

A VOICE STILL BEING HEARD

THE IMPACT AND LEGACY OF THE MINISTRY OF THE REVEREND GEORGE
WHITEFIELD

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ABSTRACT

In every generation, God has called those who would be pastors, teachers, and evangelists. In 1738, a young English evangelist named George Whitefield was called by God to proclaim the gospel to all who would hear. He crossed geographic, ecclesiastical, social, and cultural bounds to share the Good News about Jesus Christ. This thesis will explore the ministry of Reverend George Whitefield and its impact on the church in the 1700s as well as today. It will identify and examine the spiritual characteristics admired in Whitefield today.

CHAPTER ONE

IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

In 1737, at the beginning of his ministry, the Reverend George Whitefield sat for his ministerial portrait. The artist, J. Cochran, painted Whitefield in his black clerical robe with one hand on his chest and one hand resting on a table, holding a Bible.¹ His right eye appears to be looking straight ahead, while his left eye is rolled inward, gazing in a different direction. It is hard not to focus on this defect in Whitefield's eye, likely caused by the improper treatment for measles when Whitefield was a young boy, about four years of age. This image of Whitefield seemingly looking in two directions characterizes the two opposing ways that Rev. Whitefield has been viewed in the last three hundred years. To some, he stands as one of the most influential people of the eighteenth century. To others, he was a self-aggrandizing churchman who inflated his talent through the print media.

From 2003 to 2014, I served as the pastor of the Old South Church in Newburyport, Massachusetts and preached above the crypt where Whitefield is buried. The third week I was at the church, Dr. Michael Haykin, author of *The Revived Puritan*:

¹ Frank Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity: George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 5.

The Spirituality of George Whitefield, visited with a local pastor for a tour of the church and crypt.² Although very gracious, Dr. Haykin asked me a number of questions about Whitefield's ministry, none of which I could answer. I soon learned that scores would be visiting the church to relive the days when Whitefield called upon thousands of New Englanders to experience the new birth in response to the gospel of Jesus Christ. I began a two-year study of Whitefield to become the resource that many longed for when they visited Old South Church. Two years later, E. A. Johnston from Nashville, Tennessee visited the church to research his book, *George Whitefield: Definitive Biography*.³ He offered me a wealth of information and anecdotes about Whitefield. As different visitors asked more questions that I did not know the answers to, I committed myself to the study of Whitefield.

From 1736 to 1770, Reverend Whitefield was among the best-known figures in the English-speaking world. Among those in ministry during the eighteenth century, Whitefield, the "Grand Itinerant" as he was widely known, was regarded by his contemporaries as the greatest preacher of their time.⁴ During the summer of 1739, Whitefield used his open-air preaching with great success. He preached to thousands in

2 Michael Haykin, ed. *The Revived Puritan*. (Dundas, Ontario: Joshua, 2000).

3 Ernest Johnston, *George Whitefield: Definitive Biography* (Stoke-On-Trent, UK: Tentmaker Publications, 2008).

4 Steven Lawson, *The Evangelistic Zeal of George Whitefield* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2013), 15.

Moorfields, England. Thirty thousand people gathered to hear him at Kennington Common, London. Eighty thousand people gathered to hear him at Hyde Park. It is estimated that, during that one summer of preaching in and around London, Whitefield preached to one million people.⁵ As his popularity grew in England, he set sail for the American colonies. By 1740, he had become the most famous man in the American colonies. Twenty thousand people filled Boston Common to hear him preach, during a time period when the entire population of Boston itself was only seventeen thousand.

In the era in which he preached, Whitefield stood alone. In his thirty-four years of preaching, he preached at least eighteen thousand sermons. He offered countless other so called “exhortations,” as Rev. Whitefield called them, often in private homes, that often lasted as long as sermons in many denominations today. Including these exhortations, he likely preached over thirty thousand times. Preaching three sermons a day was a common occurrence; on occasion, he preached four. Over thirty years of his preaching ministry, he preached to combined audiences of over ten million people.⁶ Eighty percent of America’s colonists heard him at least once before 1770, a feat achieved only by him.⁷ As the Reverend J. C. Ryle remarked,

⁵ Lawson, *The Evangelistic Zeal of George Whitefield*, 15.

⁶ James I. Packer, “The Spirit with the Word: The Reformational Revivalism of George Whitefield,” in *The Bible the Reformation and the Church: Essays in Honor of James Atkinson*, W. P. Stephens, ed. (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 168.

⁷ Packer, “The Spirit with the Word,” 168.

No preacher in England has ever succeeded in arresting the attention of such crowds as Whitefield constantly addressed around London. No preacher has ever been so universally popular in every country that he visited, in England, Scotland, and America. No preacher has ever retained his hold on his hearers so entirely as he did for thirty-four years. His popularity never waned.⁸

Whitefield's preaching moved people in ways few had done before. Many people, after hearing Whitefield preach, were moved to respond first in faith, and second in either ministry or championing a cause for others. Benjamin Randall was a young man when he heard Whitefield preach the Gospel in Portsmouth, New Hampshire in 1770. Giving his life to Jesus only after Whitefield died, Randall was called to be a Baptist pastor, and eventually became the founder of the Free Will Baptist denomination.⁹ Robert Robertson, who penned the words to "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing," and the abolitionist William Wilberforce, whose anti-slavery efforts helped the English Parliament abolish the slave trade in 1807, both came to faith through Whitefield's preaching.¹⁰ John Fawcett of Yorkshire, England, who heard Whitefield preach and later became a pastor serving a Baptist church for fifty-four years, would go on to write the hymn, "Blest Be The Tie That Binds."¹¹ Henry Tanner of Plymouth, England was a shipbuilder when he

⁸ J. C. Ryle, "George Whitefield and His Ministry," in *Select Sermons of George Whitefield*, J. C. Ryle, ed. (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Trust, 1997), 32.

⁹ Dan Nelson, *A Burning and Shining Light: The Testimony and Witness of George Whitefield* (Somis, CA: LifeSong Publishers, 2017), 250.

¹⁰ Robert J. Morgan, *Then Sings My Soul* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 65.

¹¹ Albert Belden, *George Whitefield, the Awakener* (London: Sampson, Low, and Marston, 1930), 239.

heard Whitefield preach in 1743. When he arrived at the church, he was prepared to throw stones at Whitefield in protest. Yet upon hearing a sermon on Acts 7:19–20 by Reverend Whitefield, Tanner grew in his faith, was converted, and became a Methodist preacher, giving his last sermon at age eighty-six, only as he was taken from the pulpit with illness, dying later that same day.¹² Recent studies have also determined that Whitefield’s voice was one of the physically loudest in history, and that he “probably spoke directly to more individuals than any un-amplified orator in history.”¹³

Whitefield was also the first evangelist to make use of popular media. He used newspapers, pamphlets, and posters to draw huge crowds to his meetings. Partnering with Benjamin Franklin, he had numerous sermons printed for sale, expanding his reach from listeners of the gospel to readers of the gospel.¹⁴ Unlike some who labored in the same era, he left no denomination or society bearing his name. Except for journals written during the first three years of his public ministry, he did little to chronicle his life. With his eyes fixed on Jesus and on heaven, he did little to defend his ministry. Whitefield once wrote, “I am content to wait until the day of judgment to determine the content of my character. When I die the only epitaph that I desire to be engraved upon my

¹² John Gillies, *Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend George Whitefield, M. A.* (London: E. & C. Dilly, 1772), 100-102.

¹³ Braxton Boren, “Whitefield’s Voice,” in *George Whitefield, Life, Context, and Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 188.

¹⁴ Ian Maddock, *Men of One Book* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications), 238.

tombstone is ‘Here lies George Whitefield; what sort of man he was the great day will discover.’”¹⁵

Even from the day of his first public sermon, Whitefield drew mixed reviews. He notes that,

Curiosity, as you may easily guess, drew a large congregation. The sight at first a little awed me, but I was comforted with a heartfelt sense of the Divine Presence and soon found the unspeakable advantage of having been accustomed to public speaking when a boy at school and of exhorting and teaching the prisoners and the poor people in their private homes while at the University.¹⁶

Bishop Benson, vicar at St. Mary de Crypt where Whitefield was ordained, described the reaction to Whitefield’s first sermon: “People told him no other sermon had ever been delivered so well, and he blushed and fought down pride. But others complained to the Bishop that Whitefield had driven fifteen people mad; to which the Bishop replied: ‘I hope this madness continues.’”¹⁷

Historians have long asserted that Whitefield had a tremendous impact in those regions he preached in. Biographer Harry Stout touches on one of the great challenges in

¹⁵ Whitefield to Mr. J.D. (12 July 1749), *Works*, 2:268. The words from this letter are found on the inscription on the plaque next to Whitefield’s remains in the basement of the Old South Church, Newburyport, MA.

¹⁶ Harry Stout, *The Divine Dramatist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 32.

¹⁷ John Pollock, *George Whitefield and the Great Awakening* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1972), 28.

Whitefield studies: “Virtually all of the Whitefield primary sources, such as private papers and diaries, have been lost or destroyed. While a significant corpus of Whitefield’s sermons survives, most of them were composed in the first five years of his ministry.”¹⁸ Thankfully, E. A. Johnston discovered a trove of Whitefield’s letters in 2003 and has published them in his work, *George Whitefield: A Definitive Biography*. This work, published in 2008, has added much to the landscape of Whitefield studies. As Steve Lawson so eloquently articulates, “Whitefield, through his intense engagement with the world and fervent proclamation of the gospel, has much to teach us concerning what desperately needs to be recovered.”¹⁹

Biographer Arnold Dallimore describes the attitude of many after Whitefield’s death as “characterized by a strange carelessness.”²⁰ As a result, Whitefield’s reputation suffered. Nearly a century after his death, Bishop Ryle noted the depth of change in Whitefield’s reputation: “There are few men whose characters have suffered so much from misrepresentation and ignorance as George Whitefield.”²¹ As the years passed, little was done to improve the admiration of Whitefield. By Whitefield’s two-hundredth birthday in 1914, Thomas Kidd notes that among evangelical and Methodist circles, Whitefield had fallen into obscurity.²² There was a small celebration of Whitefield’s two-

18 Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, xv.

19 Lawson, *The Evangelistic Zeal of George Whitefield*, xix.

20 Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, vol. I (Westchester: Cornerstone, 1970), 6.

21 Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, vol. I, 6.

22 Thomas Kidd, *George Whitefield America’s Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 257.

hundredth birthday on Kennington Common in London in December of 1914. It was suspected that poor London weather contributed to the low number in attendance on that day.

John Stott notes the innovations in ministry that Whitefield pioneered:

“Whitefield’s pastoral pioneering, like so much else about him, is largely forgotten; which is, to say the least, an injustice and a pity.”²³ Numerous authors have sought to analyze Whitefield from a particular perspective. In *The Divine Dramatist*, Harry Stout attempted to depict Whitefield as a religious celebrity rather than a devoted servant of Christ. Frank Lambert, in his volume *Peddler in Divinity*, examined Whitefield’s ministry in the context of the consumer revolution of the eighteenth century. As the three-hundredth anniversary of his birth approached in 2014, several books were released to honor Whitefield. While several authors have made their own determinations as to what difference Whitefield makes in ministry today, there has been no survey or analysis of what characteristics of Whitefield people admire today and what difference that makes in their ministries.

Through the use of a survey sent to forty Christians who expressed an interest in Whitefield by visiting the Old South Church in Newburyport, MA and interviews with five authors with deep knowledge of Whitefield, this analysis seeks to determine what spiritual characteristics of Whitefield are admired today. This study will chart the peaks

23 Packer, “The Spirit with the Word,” 169.

and valleys of Whitefield's ministry through a literature review, including the latest biographies published around the three hundredth celebration of his birth, as well as volumes released through 2018.

Whitefield was a person wholly devoted to Jesus Christ. In his *Diary* can be found a list of criteria which he used daily to account for his actions and life that day. The list includes:

Have I,

1. Been fervent in private prayer?
2. Used stated hours of prayer?
3. Used prayer every hour?
4. After or before every deliberate conversation or action, considered how it might tend to God's glory?
5. After any pleasure, immediately given thanks?
6. Planned business for the day?
7. Been simple and recollected in everything?
8. Been zealous in undertaking and active in doing what good I could?
9. Been meek, cheerful, affable in everything I said or did?
10. Been proud, vain, unchaste, or enviable of others?
11. Recollected in eating and drinking? thankful? Temperate in sleep?
12. Taken time for given thanks according to Law's rules?
13. Been diligent in studies?
14. Thought or spoken unkindly of anyone?
15. Confessed all sin?²⁴

J. C. Ryle noted that of all the preachers of the eighteenth century, Whitefield was, "one of its most saintly characters, if not the saintliest of all."²⁵ His ministry was

²⁴ Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 80.

²⁵ Lawson, *The Evangelistic Zeal of George Whitefield*, 44.

free from any accusations or scandals. For as much as many admire Whitefield, the astute observer can discern that not every practice of Whitefield's is one that preachers and those in ministry should emulate. It is widely known that Whitefield would preach days in a row without a sabbath rest. Many observers believe this hectic pace affected his health. In 1765, when Whitefield was 51 years old, John Wesley, 11 years his senior, noted after a meeting over breakfast, "Mr. Whitefield seemed to be an old, old man, being fairly worn out in his Master's service, though he has hardly seen fifty years."²⁶ I expect that some, not wishing to repeat Whitefield's practice of "wearing out rather than rusting out," may note that self-care is now recognized as a critical component of maintaining one's life for full service to the Lord.

Like in Whitefield's era, there are many churches steeped in tradition and denominational ties that are not reaching their full potential for Christ. They need to be woken up. They need to remember the grace that comes from God, through Jesus Christ, so they can fulfill the ministry they have been entrusted to fulfill. This study will remind the reader that the life and ministry of the Reverend George Whitefield mattered. The ways in which God moved through the life of Whitefield can inspire us and encourage those who seek to do His will today.

Now that the context of Whitefield's ministry has been addressed, the theological and Biblical foundations of his ministry will be examined in Chapter Two.

26 John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1872), 238.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

In the short span of two years, the Reverend George Whitefield was transformed from an ordinary student at Oxford University into a powerful preacher drawing thousands to hear him preach a sermon in an open field. Whitefield himself attributed that change to Holy Scripture, writing, “The lively oracles of God were my soul’s delight. The book of the Divine laws was seldom out of my hand: I meditated therein day and night; and ever since that, God has made my way signally prosperous, and given me abundant success.”²⁷ Steven Lawson describes the effect of Scripture on Whitefield’s ministry:

His private acquaintance with the Word is most clearly seen in the scriptural vocabulary of his preaching. He readily used biblical metaphors, drew biblical analogies, and illustrated biblical truths with other biblical passages. Cross-references in Scripture flowed freely from his lips as he prayed that the Holy Scripture would sear the truth upon souls in need of divine grace.²⁸

48.

²⁷ George Whitefield, *George Whitefield’s Journals* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960),

²⁸ Lawson, *The Evangelistic Zeal of George Whitefield*, 33.

Reading the Bible became so consuming that he had little time to read anything else, “I got more true knowledge from reading the Book of God in one month, than I could ever have acquired from all the writings of men.”²⁹ Whitefield’s study of Scripture shaped him into Christ-likeness, “Study to know Him more and more, for the more you know, the more you will love Him.”³⁰ His study of Scripture led him to the study of Christ. For it was in Scripture that he saw Christ:

Look, therefore, always for Christ in the Scripture. He is the treasure hid in the field, both of the Old and New Testaments. In the Old you will find Him under prophecies, types, sacrifices, and shadows; in the New, manifested in the flesh, to become a propitiation for our sins as a priest, and as a prophet to reveal the whole will of his heavenly Father.³¹

It was in fact through this search for the whole will of God that Whitefield felt God leading him throughout his ministry. His first test of God’s will was in August 1736. The curate at the Tower Chapel in London asked Whitefield to come to London while he was away for two months. Whitefield recalled how this came to be:

In a short time I began to be more than content in my present state of life, had thoughts of abiding at the University, at least for some years, to finish my studies, and do what good I could amongst the poor despised Methodists. But ‘God’s thoughts are not as man’s thoughts, neither are our ways as His ways.’

29 Whitefield, *Journals*, 60.

30 M. G. Haykin, *The Revived Puritan: The Spirituality of George Whitefield* (Dundas, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2000), 105.

31 George Whitefield, *Sermons of George Whitefield* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 199-200.

Although Whitefield often willingly acknowledged his Calvinistic tendencies, he also clearly identified their source, “I embrace the Calvinistic scheme, not because of Calvin, but Jesus Christ has taught it to me.”³² His Calvinistic tendencies led him to hold fast to many doctrines that would shape both his ministry and his preaching. Whitefield often identified the doctrines of original sin, justification by faith, and the new birth as being central to his evangelistic sermons. On November 18, 1770, when John Wesley offered the sermon at Whitefield’s memorial service in London, he cited “the new birth” and “justification by faith” as the “fundamental doctrines which he everywhere insisted upon.”³³

Whitefield believed that the starting point for a faith journey was the doctrine of original sin, as he deemed it, “the very foundation of the Christian religion.”³⁴ For Whitefield preached, “If you have never felt the weight of original sin, do not call yourselves Christians.”³⁵ Ian Maddock points out that the language and theology of “imputation” were woven throughout Whitefield’s sermons.³⁶ Whitefield not only

32 George Whitefield, Letter 33, *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield*, vol. I (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771).

33 Albert C. Outler, *Sermons: The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 2 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984-1987), 343.

34 Gillies, *Works of George Whitefield*, 218.

35 J. C. Ryle, ed., *Select Sermons of George Whitefield* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), 81.

36 Ian Maddock, *Men of One Book* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications), 181.

considered his view of imputation scripturally accurate, but also in agreement with the doctrinal standards of the Church of England, in which he was ordained. In his sermon, “Of Justification by Christ,” he noted that in Romans chapter 5, Paul offers a parallel between the first and second Adam. They both acted as representatives. So, for those whom Christ died, and whose representative He is, shall have his merits imputed to them also.³⁷

The second truth central to Whitefield’s public ministry was that of “justification by faith.” In his sermon, “Of Justification by Christ,” Whitefield offered an answer to the question, “What is meant by the word justified?”

But ye are justified,” says the apostle; which is as though he had said, You have your sins forgiven and are looked upon by God as though you never had offended him at all this word justified, implies a blotting out of all our transgressions. It is a law term, and alludes to a judge acquitting an accused criminal of the thing laid to his charge by being justified, we are to understand, being so acquitted in the sight of God, as to be looked upon as though we had never offended him at all.”³⁸

The atonement of sin by Jesus’s death was a major theme of his preaching. His invitation to faith was often connected to substitutionary atonement for the sins of one who would believe in Jesus:

³⁷ Gillies, *Works*, 6:223.

³⁸ Gillies, *Works*, 6:216.

Our mountains of sins must fall before this great Zerubbabel. On Him God the Father has laid the iniquities of all that shall believe on Him; and in His own body He bare them on a tree. There, there, by faith, O mourners in Zion, may you see your Savior hanging with arms stretched out, and hear Him, as it were, thus speaking to your souls.³⁹

Whitefield shared in his *Journal* that he first came to acknowledge his need for a new birth in 1735, after reading Henry Scougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, at the recommendation of Charles Wesley, "From that moment, but not until then, did I know that I must be a new creature."⁴⁰ In fact, not only did Whitefield believe this for himself, but for every person, noting that every person prior to regeneration is, "altogether conceived and born in sin, as having no good thing dwelling in him...a filthy, corrupted, polluted wretch."⁴¹ His passion for godliness fueled his preaching:

I give to Him my soul and body to be disposed and worn out in His labour as He shall think meet. I do hence resolve, by His assistance ... to lead a stricter life than ever, to give my self to prayer and the study of the Scriptures ... God give me my health, if it be His blessed will ... I give myself wholly to Him.⁴²

Whitefield's preaching style was more dramatic than others in his day. In fact, Whitefield used dramatic presentations of Biblical scenes to communicate the truth of

39 Whitefield, Sermon 35, in *Works*, Vol. VI, 62.

40 Whitefield, *Journals*, 46-47.

41 Gillies, 6:257.

42 Whitefield, *Journals*, 61.

Scripture in his preaching. He represented the Gospel in dramatic retellings of the text.⁴³

Stephen Mansfield describes how effective Whitefield was at retelling Biblical texts:

In a largely illiterate world, George Whitefield became his own text... . He did not preach the gospel only; he recreated it. He stood before a crowd and showed them the drama of the truth, the theatre of God reaching for man... . Whitefield was a master of the power of story. He told tales from Scripture, modifying his voice to play every part or providing his own sound effects. Whitefield's method became so well known that crowds came to anticipate the word that pulled back the curtain on the of the heart; "methinks." When Whitefield spoke this word, he left the literal sense, left the exposition.... and moved to the recreations that set his meaning ablaze.⁴⁴

Not only did Whitefield appeal to a listener's sight, but also to their sense of smell. In his sermon "The Resurrection of Lazarus," he encouraged listeners to smell the decomposing body of Lazarus.

Whitefield felt that his call to field-preaching was led by God, "Everyone hath his proper gift. Field preaching is my plan. In this I am carried as on eagle's wings."⁴⁵ In his *Journals* he offers the model that Howel Harris was for him, "He discourses generally in a field, but at other times in a house, from a wall, a table, or anything else."⁴⁶ As a result

⁴³ Maddock, *Men of One Book*, 133.

⁴⁴ Stephen Mansfield, *Forgotten Founding Father* (Nashville, TN: Cumberland House Publishing, 2001), 196.

⁴⁵ Robert Philip, *The Life and Times of George Whitefield* (London: George Virtue, Ivy Lane, 1842), 385.

⁴⁶ Whitefield, *Journals*, 229.

Ian Maddock suggests, “Whitefield’s decision to preach in the fields to the Kingwood colliers in February 1739 was neither spontaneous nor without precedent.”⁴⁷

Whitefield’s letters are filled with descriptions of his sermons. The descriptions of the effects of his sermons have strong parallels that are found in the book of Acts. He uses some of the same metaphors used by Luke in describing the growth of the early church. He routinely noted how listeners were “struck” or were “melted” or “wept” by the “power” of the word preached. In Luke 2:4, 5:2; 14:3 the emotional outpouring attached to the proclamation of the gospel. Increasing numbers are noted in Acts 2:41; 2:47; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31; and 16:5.

Despite Whitefield’s many accounts of what he perceived as blessings of his preaching, he also noted failures. He attributed this to God’s providence, as not every occasion did he note that many had melted at his words. While preaching in Hampton, New Hampshire on October 1, 1740, he wrote, “Preached in the morning, though not with so much freedom as usual, at Hampton, to some thousands in the open air. The wind was almost too high for me. Some though not many, were affected. God’s Spirit bloweth when and where it listeth.”⁴⁸

Whitefield also trusted in the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. This is but one area that proved to be a disagreement with his fellow servant of Christ, John Wesley. In an often-referenced letter, Whitefield replied to Wesley about his denial of the doctrine

⁴⁷ Maddock, *Men of One Book*, 37.

⁴⁸ Whitefield, *Journal*, 466.

that proved so vital to Whitefield, “This doctrine is my daily support: I should utterly sink under a dread of my impending trials, was I not firmly persuaded that God has chosen me in Christ from before the foundation of the world, and that now being effectually called, He will suffer none to pluck me out of His almighty hand.”⁴⁹

In addition to evangelism, Whitefield felt compelled to be a part of renewal within existing congregations: “For I am persuaded the generality of preachers talk of an unknown and unfelt Christ. The reasons why congregations have been so dead is, because they had dead men preaching to them. O that the Lord may quicken and revive them! How can dead men beget living children?”⁵⁰

Deuteronomy provides a framework for understanding a biblical perspective for studying the life of Whitefield. The book of Deuteronomy offers a call to total commitment to the Lord in worship and obedience. Its structure is that of a covenant renewal document, with its emphasis on the covenant between the Lord and his people. Whitefield’s deep passion was for individuals to be brought into covenant relationship with God and to grow in their love for Him.

The theme of remembrance is thoroughly woven into the pages of Scripture. While many passages remind us of the need to remember, the books of Deuteronomy and the Psalms offer the most material to build a Biblical framework to remember the spiritual characteristics of Whitefield. Deuteronomy chronicles the last day of Moses’s

49 Whitefield, *Journal*, 578.

50 Whitefield, *Journal*, 470.

life. Standing before Moses is a community of faith, a group who for one moment in its history is where it is supposed to be. Moses has the opportunity to remind them how they got there and where they are going. In chapters 1 through 4 of Deuteronomy, Moses re-narrates the story of the Israelites. Whitefield may be seen as a Moses-like figure. He reminded those who would hear to remember God's grace through Jesus Christ.

There is no doubt that Whitefield was called to proclaim the gospel throughout the world. He once wrote in a letter to a friend, "the whole world is now my parish. Wherever my master calls me, I am ready to go and preach his everlasting gospel."⁵¹ Matthew 28:19 propelled him through the nations and regions as he proclaimed the gospel. After he was denied access to many Church of England pulpits, Whitefield proclaimed the gospel through field preaching. In his *Journals*, Whitefield noted the example of fellow Welsh revivalist Howell Harris who had preached in fields across seven Welsh counties in 1735. Harris proved to be an influential mentor to Whitefield, who remarked after a visit to see Harris in Wales in 1739, "I wanted to catch some of his fire."⁵² As Whitefield continued his field-preaching ministry, he was subjected to ecclesiastical opposition, social ridicule, and mob violence, including being assaulted with items such as vegetables and dead cats.⁵³ Surely it was God's call through the Scripture that kept Whitefield committed to this task.

51 Whitefield, *Letters*, 105.

52 Whitefield, *Letters*, 229.

53 Maddock, *Men of One Book*, 196.

The doctrines of grace filled Whitefield with a calling to proclaim the gospel to those who did not yet rest their souls on the grace of God through Jesus Christ. Arnold Dallimore illustrates how Whitefield applied the doctrines of grace, “He possessed a very real understanding of them, not as an abstract system of thought, but as the teachings of the Scriptures and as the basic principles of his daily Christian life.”⁵⁴ Dallimore articulates how this was distilled for Whitefield. Those who opposed his preaching in London carefully searched his printed sermons for anything that could be used against him. At the same time, his close friends searched his sermons to warn him of any points that they thought were not as articulate as they could be. Dallimore concludes that this exercise led Whitefield to be very precise about his beliefs and as a result, he had come to an increased understanding and deep conviction about the doctrines of grace, that God is sovereign in the whole plan of redemption.⁵⁵ Some claim that Whitefield became a Calvinist only after going to America and through the influence of American ministers. Once again Dallimore provides clarity in the matter, noting the letters exchanged with Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine, deeply committed Calvinists.⁵⁶ The last letter by Ralph to Whitefield was lengthy, a detailed theological treatise which provided the Calvinistic

54 Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol. I, 409.

55 Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, vol. I, 405.

56 Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, vol. I, 405.

tenets and Scriptural support.⁵⁷ Perhaps the strongest influence came from Dr. John Edwards of Cambridge University. Whitefield read his book, *The Preacher*, along with an extraction by Jonathan Warr in his books entitled *The Church of England-Man turned Dissenter*, and *Arminianism the Backdoor to Popery*, and realized, “There are such noble testimonies given before that University, on justification by faith only, the imputed righteousness of Christ, our having no free will, &c., that they deserve to be written in letters of gold.”⁵⁸ He revealed the source of his theological underpinnings, when he wrote to John Wesley on August 25, 1740, “Alas, I never read anything that Calvin wrote; My doctrines I had from Christ and his Apostles; I was taught them of God.”⁵⁹ This journal entry was recorded while Whitefield was making his voyage to America for the first time. In another letter he summarizes his thoughts on the doctrines of grace:

This, however, is my comfort, “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and for ever.” He saw me from all eternity; He gave me being; He called me in time; He has freely justified me through faith in His blood; He has in part sanctified me by His Spirit: He will preserve me underneath His everlasting arms till time shall be no more. Oh the blessedness of these evangelical truths! These are indeed Gospel; they are glad tidings of great joy to all that have ears to hear. These, bring the

⁵⁷ Arnold Dallimore astutely notes that Luke Tyerman quotes an author who wrote that Whitefield was not a Calvinist until he went to America in 1739, becoming influenced by Jonathan Edwards of America. Dallimore notes that this error of attributing Whitefield’s Calvinistic views to Jonathan Edwards of America is an error that has “been copied by many.”

⁵⁸ Whitefield, *Journals*, 335.

⁵⁹ Whitefield, *Letters*, 205.

creature out of himself. These, make him hang upon the promises, and cause his obedience to flow from a principle to love.⁶⁰

Whitefield stands as one of the noted examples of a strong Calvinist committed to evangelism. Some may be puzzled by his fervent commitment to proclaiming the Gospel and yet holding a high view of Calvinism. For Whitefield, however, it was a natural fit: “Though I hold particular election, yet I offer Jesus freely to every individual soul.”⁶¹

Embedded in every sermon was a call to commit oneself to Jesus Christ. Lee Gatiss notes:

Every time, (Whitefield) makes an appeal to his listeners to respond to what they have heard in the living and active word of God. His appeals were variously based on the text and could be either invitations to enjoy the benefits spoken of, warnings to escape the wrath to come, pleadings to accept an offer given, or commands to repent and obey a new Lord.⁶²

One example of this is in the following sermon:

Come, then, unto Christ, everyone that hears me this night; I offer Jesus Christ, pardon, and salvation to all you who will accept thereof.
Come, O you drunkards; lay aside your cups, drink no more to excel; come and drink of the water which Christ will give you, and then you will thirst no more.
Come, O you thieves; let him that has stolen, steal no more, but fly unto Christ, and He will receive you.

⁶⁰ *Works of Whitefield*, Vol. I, 98.

⁶¹ Marcus Loane, *Oxford and the Evangelical Succession* (London: Butterworth, 1950), 41.

⁶² Lee Gatiss, *The Sermons of George Whitefield*, vol. I (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 22.

Come unto Him, O you harlots; lay aside your lusts and turn unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon you; He will cleanse you of all your sins and wash you in His blood.

Come, all you liars; come all you Pharisees; come, all you fornicators, adulterers, swearers, and blasphemers; come to Christ, and He will take away all your filth; He will cleanse you from your pollution, and your sins shall be done away.

Come, come my guilty brethren; I beseech you for Christ's sake, and for your immortal soul's sake, to come unto Christ.⁶³

There are some who misunderstand Calvinism and therefore misunderstand the theological motivation behind Whitefield's motivation for his fervent preaching. Steve Lawson clarifies this misunderstanding:

Contrary to the popular Calvinistic stereotype, Whitefield was not a stale stoic intellectual with a dour approach to Christianity. He was fervently enlivened by the sovereign grace of God, which sparked an intense urgency in his gospel preaching it was his belief in the Doctrines of Grace that propelled his gospel proclamation far and wide. The deeper Whitefield plunged into these sacred truths, the higher he ascended in his declaration of them.⁶⁴

Whitefield was thus steeped in the doctrines of grace and deeply committed to a ministry of grace: "You know how strongly I assert all the doctrines of grace, as held forth in the Westminster confession of Faith and the doctrinal articles of the Church of England. These I trust I shall adhere to as long as I live because I verily believe they are the truths of God, and have felt the power of them in my own heart."⁶⁵

⁶³ Whitefield, *Sermon 51 in Works*, vol. VI, 298.

⁶⁴ Lawson, *The Evangelistic Zeal of George Whitefield*, 51.

⁶⁵ John Gillies, *Memoirs of Rev. George Whitefield* (Middletown: Hunt and Noyes, 1883), 95.

His commitment to the Church of England was to see men nurtured on solid evangelical principles be brought up from within the ranks of the Church. To that end, he undertook four primary aims:

1. He proclaimed that salvation is not obtained by human works, but solely through Divine grace, and affirmed that regeneration is the first requirement of the true ministry.
2. He urged all born again clergymen to be constantly busy, and exhorted them not to be satisfied to preach only on Sundays but to do so seven days a week.
3. He sought to influence such men to itinerate—to evangelize their own parishes completely, but also, where spiritual need required it, to enter other parishes without inhibition.
4. He urged men not to be deterred by the opposition that an evangelical ministry would be sure to meet, but to make a break with every earthly consideration and to become, if necessary, “fools for Christ’s sake.”⁶⁶

Preaching was of primary importance to Whitefield. Several authors have commented on the power of Whitefield’s preaching. Cornelius Winter noted the particular dynamics of Whitefield’s preaching, “It would be only by hearing him, and by beholding his attitude and his tears, that a person could well conceive of the effect. ... He had a most peculiar art of speaking personally to you, in a congregation of four thousand people.”⁶⁷

Perhaps one of the clearest theological truths was Whitefield’s sense of catholicity. His primary question to anyone was, “Are you a Christian?”⁶⁸ This truth is illustrated by the powerful sermon that Whitefield often preached, which included the

⁶⁶ Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol. I, 306.

⁶⁷ Kidd, *George Whitefield America’s Spiritual Founding Father*, 240.

⁶⁸ Whitefield, *Works*, vol. I, Letter CXXXV, 126.

illustration of him gazing toward heaven and asking of Father Abraham if there were any Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, or Independents in heaven. After being repeatedly told that such were not there, Whitefield cried, “Why, who have you then?” to which Abraham replied: “We don’t know those names here. All that are here are Christians.”⁶⁹

Whitefield himself reflected on his enthusiasm in the later years of his life. On his last voyage from the American colonies to London, he wrote a new edition of his *Journals*. He realized:

Alas, Alas, In how many things I have judged and acted wrong. I have been too rash and hasty in giving characters, both of places and persons. Being fond of scripture language, I have often used a style too apostolical, and at the same time I have been too bitter in my zeal. Wild-fire has been mixed with it, and I find that I frequently wrote and spoke in my own spirit, when I thought I was writing and speaking by the assistance of the spirit of God.⁷⁰

We see the profound sense of pastoral reflection, so critical to a life lived in step with the Master. Whatever ego Whitefield was accused of having was laid at the foot of the cross in the later years of his life. This act is critical for any ministry leader who desires to finish well. Recognizing one’s faults and sins opens the door to sanctification. It is that process that he desired all his life, yet few saw it.

⁶⁹ Stuart Clark Henry, *George Whitefield: Wayfaring Witness* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1957), 152.

⁷⁰ Gillies, 202, 237.

Throughout Whitefield's ministry were occasions in which local Anglican priests turned down his request to preach in local pulpits. Whitefield took these rejections as a sign of persecution, and believed that such rejection would eventually yield God's blessing on his ministry.⁷¹ In fact, such a rejection would occur in the very town where he is buried today. On his first New England tour in 1740, he visited the town at the mouth of the Merrimack River in Massachusetts, at the time Newbury, later to be named Newburyport. Rev. Christopher Toppan, pastor of the First Church in Newbury, was not sympathetic to the revival and was reported to carry a whip to discourage revivalists from gathering at the "house of prayer."⁷² Whitefield arrived in a snowstorm to find open-air preaching impossible and every pulpit closed to him except one, that of the Third Church, pastored by John Lowell. After he preached at the Third Church (now the Unitarian Church on Pleasant Street in Newburyport), 143 members were added to the rolls.⁷³

Several passages of Scripture offered inspiration and motivation to Whitefield, including Romans 15:20, "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation."

While John Wesley was in Georgia, he wrote to Whitefield to describe the opportunities for ministry in Georgia, sharing with him the verse, Matthew 9:37, "The

71 Thomas Kidd, *The Great Awakening* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 45.

72 Belden, *George Whitefield, the Awakener*, 109.

73 Belden, *George Whitefield, the Awakener*, 110.

harvest is truly plenteous, but the laborers are few.” Would someone heed the call? He ended the entreaty as follows: “What if thou art the man, Mr. Whitefield?”⁷⁴ These words of Scripture, and this plain request, embedded in Wesley’s letter, offered Whitefield the conviction needed to begin his ministry in America. Throughout Whitefield’s correspondence, he reported on God’s blessing on his preaching. Two lines from Scripture repeatedly appeared in his accounts, the first from 2 Thessalonians 3:1, “the word runs and is glorified.” The second, from John 4:35, when Jesus shares with his followers that the fields were, “white already to harvest.”⁷⁵

As we reflect on a life of obedience, we remember such passages as Psalm 77:11, “I will remember the deeds of the Lord,” writes the Psalmist. We remember how God used one person to touch the lives of so many on two continents, during an era when many never left the continent they lived on. We remember the miracles the Lord did, through his grace, of bringing thousands of souls to Himself through the preaching of the gospel by Rev. Whitefield. As we reflect on a life lived committed to God, we echo the words of the Psalmist, “I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds,” Psalm 77:12. “We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done,” Psalm 78:4.

⁷⁴ Edward J. Cashin, *Beloved Bethesda: A History of George Whitefield’s Home for Boys, 1740-2000* (Atlanta: Mercer University Press, 2001), 3.

⁷⁵ Michael G. Haykin, *The Revived Puritan: The Spirituality of George Whitefield* (Dundas: Joshua Press, 2000), 61.

Having explored the theological and Biblical foundations of this study, we will now examine the literature written by Whitefield and the biographical accounts written about him after his death.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

It may be hard to believe that a man who preached over eighteen thousand sermons in his lifetime left so few of them behind. The printed words of Whitefield are few compared to the multitude of words that he shared with his listeners. After his death, numerous authors have felt compelled to fill the gap of pages that Whitefield left. From mere descriptions of his life, to analysis of particular aspects of his ministry, many volumes have been published to offer reflection and commentary on the life and ministry of Whitefield. I have selected volumes that offer particular insight into the spiritual characteristics of Whitefield that will be of interest to this study.

While many pages have been written about Whitefield since his first sermon, his own letters, from the first addressed to Gabriel Harris on July 18, 1734, to the last written to Robert Keen on September 23, 1770, just one week before his death, provide the words of the “Grand Itinerant” himself. The latest version of these *Letters of George Whitefield*, published by Banner of Truth Trust in 1976, offers letters absent from previous editions. As the Introduction in the 1976 version states, letters offer insight into a person’s soul, “Personal letters reveal a man’s heart. Just as a reader cannot well know the apostle Paul, for example, apart from his correspondence addressed to churches and individuals, so one

cannot know Whitefield at all fully unless they have access to his letters.”⁷⁶ This collection of letters is a result of the original collection published by Dr. John Gillies, a personal friend of Whitefield. Dr. Gillies ministered in the College Church, Glasgow, Scotland from 1742 to 1796.⁷⁷ His volume, *Memoirs of Rev. George Whitefield*, includes a rich biographical sketch with appropriate letters by Whitefield. Twenty-seven of Whitefield’s sermons along with a “Short Address” and the Letter to Wesley are included in the 648-page volume. Gillies includes an insightful essay by Benjamin Franklin concerning Whitefield’s preaching:

By hearing him often I came to distinguish easily between sermons newly composed, and those which he had often preached in the course of his travels. His delivery of the latter was so improved by frequent repletion, that every accent, every emphasis, every modulation of voice was so perfectly well turned, and well placed, that, without being interested in the subject, one could not help being pleased with the discourse: a pleasure of much the same kind with that received from an excellent piece of music. This is an advantage itinerant preachers have over those who are stationary, as the latter cannot well improve their delivery of a sermon by so many rehearsals. It was a great advantage, but it was not the only one, nor the greatest which he derived from repeating his discourses, and reciting them instead of reading them. Had they been delivered from a written copy, one delivery would have been like the last; the paper would have operated like a spell, from which he could no depart-invention sleeping, while the utterance followed the eye. But when he had nothing before him except the audience whom he was addressing, the judgement and the imagination, as well as the memory, were called forth. Those parts were omitted which had been felt to come feebly from the tongue, and fall heavily upon the ear, and their place was supplied by matter newly laid in in(sic)the course of his studies, or fresh from the feeling of the

⁷⁶ Whitefield, *Letters*, 1976, ix.

⁷⁷ Whitefield, *Letters*, viii.

moment. They who lived with him, could trace him in his sermons to the book which he had last been reading, or the subject which had recently taken his attention. But the salient points of his oratory were not prepared passages, they were bursts of passion, like jets from a Geyser(sic), when the spring is in full play.⁷⁸

Whitefield's *Journals* begin with what he saw God do in his soul:

Although the following Account of what God has done for my soul, will undoubtedly be differently judged of by different people; yet, since I believe, a single eye to God's glory moves me to write, and I find myself much pressed in spirit to publish it at this time, I am not in the least solicitous about the reception it will meet with in the world.⁷⁹

He details his birth, his school years, and his enrolling at Oxford University. He notes the influence of the book, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* by Henry Scougal in his early spiritual life as well as being discipled by John Wesley.⁸⁰ He goes into great detail about his early spiritual wrestlings.⁸¹ He describes his usual spiritual practice, "I followed my usual practice of reading and praying over the Word of God upon my knees."⁸²

Numerous times in his *Journals* he refers to himself like the apostle Paul, referring himself as "the chief of sinners."⁸³ One area of Whitefield's life that is addressed in his

78 John Gillies, *Memoirs of Rev. George Whitefield* (Middletown: Hunt and Noyes, 1883), 95.

79 Whitefield, *Letters*, 35.

80 Whitefield, *Letters*, 46-47.

81 Whitefield, *Letters*, 51-57.

82 Whitefield, *Letters*, 87.

83 Whitefield, *Journal*, 207.

Journals, that is rarely written about elsewhere is his time aboard ship, “Had delightful sailing, and very thankful that God called me abroad to see and admire His wonders in the deep.”⁸⁴ Two anecdotes tell of the lessons he learned while on board. On one trip the ship’s captain hooked a dolphin and brought it over the rail, and Whitefield reflected how quickly the beautiful fish lost its God-given color as it succumbed to being out of the water, “Just so is man, he flourishes for a little while, but when once death cometh how quickly is his beauty gone. A Christian may learn a lesson of instruction from everything he meets with.”⁸⁵ On another voyage, during a season of loneliness and betrayal, he was encouraged by an example he saw in the water of a shark swimming behind the ship:

The shark was attended with five little fishes called the Pilot Fish, much like a mackerel, but larger. These I am told always keep the shark company and what is most surprising, though the shark is so ravenous a creature, yet let it be never so hungry, it never touches one of them. Nor are they less faithful to him for if at any time the shark is hooked, these little creatures will not forsake him, but cleave close to his fins, and are often taken up with him. Go to the Pilot Fish, thou that forsakest a friend in adversity, consider his ways and be abashed. This simple sight one would think sufficient to confute any atheist in the world.⁸⁶

Whitefield's sermons offer deep insight as well. Unfortunately, of the over eighteen thousand sermons preached in his lifetime, he only authorized fifty-seven to be

84 Whitefield, *Journal*, 102.

85 Whitefield, *Journal*, 148.

86 Whitefield, *Journal*, 142.

printed.⁸⁷ Lee Gatiss has collected these fifty-seven sermons, plus two others that were authorized by John Gilles to appear in 1772, but which are absent in collections after that.⁸⁸ Two additional sermons of both theological and historical interest have been added to the volume. He notes that while he has been conscious of Whitefield's disdain for editors, he has been careful to ensure that Whitefield can be understood by modern audiences.⁸⁹ He has kept the King James Version from which Whitefield preached. He notes how often Whitefield exudes Biblical references, using allusion and quotations from across Scripture, noting that he, like John Bunyan share the uncommon condition of "bibline."⁹⁰ Referring to Whitefield's frequent use of Bible references, and his motivation:

It may also be a function of the high regard in which he held the word of God. He believed the power of the word to do God's work, so that even a less well-known passage of the Bible may be used to awaken a dead sinner or prod a sleepy Christian or pique the curiosity of an onlooker. It would be an unusual seeker today, however, who would immediately grasp the significance of Whitefield's appeal in Sermon 40, unrelated to the text on, "Do not be Bethshemites!"⁹¹

87 Lee Gatiss, *The Sermons of George Whitefield*, Vol. I (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 38.

88 Gatiss, *The Sermons of George Whitefield*, 39.

89 Gatiss, *The Sermons of George Whitefield*, 40.

90 Gatiss, *The Sermons of George Whitefield*, 40.

91 Gatiss, *The Sermons of George Whitefield*, 41.

Whitefield notes in Sermon 23, “I speak in plain language, you know my way of preaching. I do not want to play the orator, I do not want to be counted a scholar. I want to speak so as I may reach poor people’s hearts”⁹² In Sermon 2, “Walking with God” from Genesis 5:24, he offers a typical evangelistic sermon. After a firm exposition of the text he offers a call to faith, “We now proceed to the third general thing proposed, to offer some motives to excite all to come and walk with God.”⁹³ Sermon 3, “Abraham’s Offering Up His Son Isaac,” is another evangelistic sermon that is classic Whitefield. He reminds his listeners, “This, this is the gospel. This is the only way of finding acceptance with God. Good works have nothing to do with our justification in his sight. We are justified by faith alone, as saith the article of our church, agreeable to which the Apostle Paul says, “By grace ye are saved, through faith. And that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”⁹⁴ Sermon 27 is another classic Whitefield sermon, “Blind Bartimeus.” The evangelist’s call is clear, “Follow therefore the example of Bartimeus. Cast away your garment. Lay aside every weight and the sin which doth most easily beset you, arise and come to Jesus.”⁹⁵

In his book *The Life of George Whitefield*, Luke Tyerman offers a detailed biography in two volumes. At times the details are overwhelming even for an ardent and

92 Gatiss, *The Sermons of George Whitefield*, 395.

93 Gatiss, *The Sermons of George Whitefield*, 75.

94 Gatiss, *The Sermons of George Whitefield*, 94.

95 Gatiss, *The Sermons of George Whitefield*, 464.

devoted Whitefield follower. Ironically, he offers an excuse for the volume in the preface:

The world has a right to know all that can be told of such a man. To say nothing of almost innumerable sketches, at least half a dozen lives of Whitefield have been already published. If the reader asks why I have dared to add to the number of those biographies? I answer, because I possessed a large amount of biographical material which previous biographers had not employed, and much of which seems to be unknown to them.⁹⁶

He notes his aim, “I have merely done my utmost to collect information concerning Whitefield, and have related the facts as clearly, concisely, and honestly as I could. I have also, as far as possible, acted upon the principle of making Whitefield his own biographer.”⁹⁷ He offers great confidence in his work, “With the exception of a few instances, all of which acknowledged, my facts are taken from original sources; and, though to say so many savor of vanity, I believe there is now no information concerning Whitefield, of any public importance, which is not contained in the present volumes.”⁹⁸ He sums up Whitefield’s ministry:

George Whitefield was pre-eminently the outdoor preacher; the most popular evangelist of the age;—a roving revivalist,—who with unequaled eloquence and power, spent above thirty years in testifying to enormous crowds, in Great Britain

96 Tyerman, *The Life of George Whitefield*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton), 1890 Vol. I, iv.

97 Tyerman, *The Life of George Whitefield*, Vol. I, vi.

98 Tyerman, *The Life of George Whitefield*, Vol. I, iv.

and America, the gospel of the grace of God. Practically, he belonged to no denomination of Christians, but was friend of all. His labors, popularity and success were marvelous, perhaps unparalleled. All churches in England, Wales, Scotland, and the British settlements in America, were permanently benefited by piety, his example, and the few great truths which he continually preached.⁹⁹

Tyerman writes of Wesley's note to Whitefield that he received abroad the *Whittaker*, while waiting to leave for his first voyage to America, "Who can estimate what would have been the consequences of Whitefield's yielding to Wesley's wish? Had he returned to London the probability is he would never again have started for America; and in such a case, many of the brightest chapters of his history could never have been penned."¹⁰⁰

Tyerman reminds us of the call to live lives devoted to the Lord:

Half a dozen men like Whitefield would at any time move a nation, stir its churches, and reform its morals. Whitefield's power was not in his talents not even in his oratory, but in his piety. In some respects, he has no successors; but in prayer, in faith, in religious experience, in devotedness to God, he may have many. Such men are the gift of God, and are infinitely more valuable than all the gold in the Church's coffers. Never did the world need them more than it needs them now. May Whitefield's God raise them up, and thrust them out!¹⁰¹

Tyerman's second volume continues with Whitefield's second visit to Scotland in 1742, as he notes the revivals in both Cambuslang and Kilsyth after Whitefield's

99 Tyerman, *The Life of George Whitefield*, Vol. I, 115.

100 Tyerman, *The Life of George Whitefield*, Vol. I, 115.

101 Tyerman, *The Life of George Whitefield*, Vol. I, 105.

preaching there.¹⁰² He notes the occasion of Whitefield's first service at Lady Huntington's palace, after which Whitefield noted, "I went home, never more surprised at any incident in my life."¹⁰³ He notes the aristocrats that heard Whitefield.¹⁰⁴ Tyerman provides the preacher and location of the seventeen memorial sermons preached after Whitefield's death, seven of which were published.¹⁰⁵

Since it had been nearly a century since Gillies's book and only two biographies had been written in that time, J.R. Andrews wrote his volume, *George Whitefield: A Light Rising in Obscurity*. In the next 100 years several biographies appeared, including Stuart Henry's volume, *George Whitefield; Wayfaring Witness*. He explores Whitefield's theological underpinnings. He includes an extensive chronology of Whitefield's life that is extremely helpful in placing the numerous events of his life within the context of his ministry.¹⁰⁶ In one of the more detailed descriptions of Whitefield's persecutions, he reminds readers of the cost of discipleship.¹⁰⁷

One of the few bridge biographies, between the early biographies and Dallimore, is *George Whitefield: The Awakener*, by Albert Belden. Belden was one of the first English biographers to visit Whitefield's crypt in Newburyport, MA. In fact, Belden was intent on returning Whitefield's remains to London to be interred at Westminster Abbey:

102 Tyerman, *The Life of George Whitefield*, Vol II, 2-3.

103 Tyerman, *The Life of George Whitefield*, Vol. I, 208.

104 Tyerman, *The Life of George Whitefield*, Vol. I, 209-210.

105 Tyerman, *The Life of George Whitefield*, Vol. II, 619-21.

106 Henry, *George Whitefield*, 200-210.

107 Henry, *George Whitefield*, 82,83.

“Protestants on both sides of the Atlantic owed an ‘incalculable obligation’ to Whitefield, who should not lie ‘semi-exposed to view in conditions of meager dignity’ in Massachusetts but deserved a resting place in ‘the most honorable shrine of the English speaking people,’ Westminster Abbey.”¹⁰⁸ He reminds readers in the opening lines of the global reach of Whitefield, from the words of F. W. Boreham:

George Whitefield was the first man who treated Great Britain and America as if they belonged to him. He passed from one to the other as though they were a pair of rural villages and he was the minister in charge of the parish. George Whitefield took a couple of continents under his wing, and the wing proved capacious enough for the task.¹⁰⁹

He is one of the few authors who provides a detailed summary of the heritage of the churches that Whitefield founded in Great Britain.¹¹⁰ He offers readers a note that Whitefield wrote his mother, one of the few times it is included in a volume outside of his letters:

My dear and honored Mother,

¹⁰⁸ Geordan Hammond and David Ceri Jones, eds. *George Whitefield: Life, Context and Legacy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

¹⁰⁹ Albert D. Belden, *George Whitefield, the Awakener* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1953), ix.

¹¹⁰ Belden, *George Whitefield, the Awakener*, 192-206. There is no mention of any church in America, such as the Old South Church, in Newburyport, Massachusetts, despite an acknowledgement to the clerk of session of the First Presbyterian church, Newburyport, MA for an illustration.

To-Morrow it will be thirty-five years since you brought unworthy me into the world. Alas! how little I have done for you, and how much less for Him who formed me. This is my comfort; I hope you want for nothing. Thanks be to God for His goodness to you in your old age! I hope you comfort yourself in Him, who I trust, will be your portion for ever(sic). After Christmas I hope to see you. My wife sends you her most dutiful respects. If you would have anything brought more than you have mentioned, pray write to, honored mother, your ever dutiful, though unworthy son,

“George Whitefield”¹¹¹

Arnold Dallimore's two volume work, *George Whitefield*, continues to be the gold standard of Whitefield biographies. He reminds readers that “George Whitefield as the eighteenth century knew him, and George Whitefield as he is thought of today, are two widely different persons.”¹¹² A small-town Canadian pastor, Dallimore sought to remind readers of the blessing Whitefield was and still is to Christendom. It took Dallimore thirty years to produce his first volume. He withstood frequent criticism from the congregation he served, as he often heard he was “wasting his time” while preparing the manuscript. He resigned from his pastorate in 1973 so he could devote himself to the writing of the second volume of Whitefield’s biography.¹¹³ He heaps praise on Whitefield, from the very first page, offering the view of E. C. Dargan, “the history of preaching since the apostles does not contain a greater or worthier name than that of George Whitefield.”¹¹⁴

111 Belden, *George Whitefield, the Awakener*, 208.

112 Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol. I, 5.

113 Kidd, *George Whitefield: America’s Spiritual Founding Father*, 2.

114 Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol. 1, 5.

His argument is that, despite his character and his achievement, Whitefield has not received the attention, praise, and thanks that he deserves. He articulates this clearly:

During the years that followed his death mankind's attitude towards him became characterized by a strange carelessness. Precise investigations largely lacking, the accusations made by his enemies were given wide circulation, the great accomplishments of his life were gradually forgotten and his memory was allowed to sink into neglect. When nearly a century had passed, Bishop Ryle, reflecting on this curious turn of events, stated "There are few men whose characters have suffered so much from misrepresentation and ignorance as George Whitefield."¹¹⁵

Dallimore offers a "perfect storm" of causes for this neglect. First, even though his ministry spanned three decades, only the first three years are covered in his *Journals*. Despite numerous inaccuracies that circulated about his life, Whitefield refused to give erroneous accounts time and attention, and therefore rarely defended himself. In fact, he offered that he was playing for an audience of one: "When urged by friends to reply to certain false accusations, lest he be lastingly stigmatized, he replied, 'I am content to wait until the judgment day for the clearing up of my character.'"¹¹⁶ Some suggested that he form a new denomination and in so doing, his name would be remembered until Jesus returns. To this suggestion Whitefield replied, "Let the name of Whitefield perish, but Christ be glorified!"¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol. 1, 6.

¹¹⁶ Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol. 1, 6.

¹¹⁷ Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol. 1, 7.

As Dallimore recounts Whitefield's early years and the beginning of his born-again life, he reminds readers that of all the members of Oxford's Holy Club, it was in fact Whitefield who most likely became the first member to clearly articulate an understanding of Christianity's main doctrines, noting: "In fine, the Holy Club men knew little or nothing of grace as taught in the Scriptures."¹¹⁸ He carefully explains the theological positions of Whitefield, noting particularly the doctrines of grace: "Whitefield possessed a very real understanding of the doctrines of grace not as an abstract system of thought, but as the teachings of the Scriptures and as the basic principles of his daily Christian life."¹¹⁹ He adds numerous photos and illustrations of Whitefield sites, including Whitefield's Tabernacle in Moorfields, the Tottenham Court Road Chapel, the Old South Church in Newburyport, Massachusetts, the Parsonage of the Reverend Jonathan Parsons, where Whitefield died, and the Cenotaph located in the Old South Church, Newburyport. Dallimore details the courtship of Elizabeth James by Whitefield. He notes the difficulty of living with Whitefield for some:

Furthermore, life with Whitefield would not have been entirely easy. Though he was meek and yielding in anything relating to his personal convenience, in all things bearing on the disciplines of the Christian life he was inflexible. He lived according to rule, rising at four each morning and, throughout the day allowed no moment to be lost. He was unfailingly prompt and neat and maintained everything around him in the strictest orderliness.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol. I, 72.

¹¹⁹ Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol. I, 409.

¹²⁰ Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol II, 111.

Dallimore details Whitefield's American tour in 1754. While previous visits sparked great opposition to his preaching, those critics were far less vocal this time around. Dallimore notes the large crowds that came to hear him preach in Boston, with so many gathering at Boston's Old North Church, that, "On one occasion the crowd was so dense he could not get in through the door and had to be put in through a window."¹²¹

In volume two, Dallimore examines more closely one year, 1750, in the life and ministry of Whitefield. That year started in London and saw him travel to Gloucester, and then onto Scotland. Of his time in London, Whitefield wrote, "While there I am continually hurried and scarce have time to eat bread." He also spoke of his longing for more time to "read, meditate and write," yet recognized that it would not be available till he should again take an ocean voyage."¹²² Dallimore notes his daily routine: "He began his day at four in the morning. He endeavored to retire at ten each night, but of course there were times when at that hour he was out on the road, riding perhaps through torrential rain or a blizzard of snow. As to his preaching, Henry Venn said that the actual time he spent at this labour was usually from forty to sixty hours a week."¹²³ He notes the deep friendship shared with Benjamin Franklin, who observed upon Whitefield's death,

¹²¹ Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol. II, 371.

¹²² Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol. II, 284.

¹²³ Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol. II, 292.

“I knew him intimately upwards of 30 years: His Integrity, Disinterestedness and indefatigable Zeal in prosecuting every good Work, I have never seen equaled, I shall never see excelled.”¹²⁴ Franklin also recounts that, despite years of witnessing by Whitefield, the message of the Gospel did not penetrate his heart: “Mr. Whitefield used to pray for my conversion, but never had the satisfaction of believing that his prayers were heard.”¹²⁵

Dallimore notes some of the lasting influences of Whitefield in the colonies, beyond the souls saved and churches renewed:

The publicity Whitefield gave to the Orphan House evoked new interest in general efforts to assist the needy and aroused other men to undertake endeavors for the underprivileged. Whitefield was directly related to the founding of three institutions of higher learning: the College of New Jersey (Princeton University), the College of Philadelphia (the University of Pennsylvania) and Dartmouth College, and only his death preventing him from completing his plans to create Bethesda College in Georgia. His labours also had a political effect. Throughout life he was the object of much ecclesiastical opposition and in the minds of many people he became a symbol of the fight for liberty and of the righteousness of withstanding an unjust and arbitrary authority. His frequent traversing of the land from one end to another served notably toward creating a sense of unity between the previously disunited Colonies, and when the Revolution was accomplished the principles of justice and equality written into the Constitution were principles that had been implanted in the public mind by the Awakening more than by any other influence.¹²⁶

124 Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol. II, 453.

125 Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol. II, 453.

126 Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol. II, 532.

One of the rare errors which Dallimore makes is on page 224 of Volume II. The picture has the words of the plaque from Christ Church Presbyterian in Bermuda, which Dallimore attributes to St. George, Bermuda. It actually is in Christ Church Presbyterian, Warwick, about ten miles west down the island from St. George.¹²⁷

Having met thousands of Christian pilgrims who wanted to see the place where Whitefield is buried, I learned that Dallimore's book was, more often than not, the first book mentioned of those who had learned anything about Whitefield from any particular volume. By far, Dallimore's book was the most commonly read book by those who visited.

Several volumes were released in the 1990s, each approaching Whitefield's ministry from different angles. The two most noted are Harry Stout's, *The Divine Dramatist* and Frank Lambert's, *Pedlar in Divinity*. Stout's book offers a character study of Whitefield to trace the roots of the formation of the skills that would lead him to become an unparalleled orator. Unfortunately, early in the first chapter, Stout erroneously places the birth place of Whitefield, the Bell Inn, and the school he attended, all in Bristol, over 75 miles from Gloucester, their actual location.¹²⁸ J. I. Packer called it a "spectacular slip."¹²⁹ Amazingly, in light of the error, Stout even begins his chapter with

¹²⁷ Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol. II, 224.

¹²⁸ Harry Stout, *The Divine Dramatist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 2.

¹²⁹ James I. Packer, "The Spirit with the Word: The Reformational Revivalism of George

a quote from Whitefield's *Journal* that begins, "I was born in Gloucester." In addition, he places the location of the wedding of Whitefield and Elizabeth James in Abergavenny, her hometown.¹³⁰ In reality, the wedding was held in Carphilly. John Piper called Stout's work, "the most sustained piece of historical cynicism I have ever read."¹³¹ Stout falsely claims that Whitefield "showed no interest in theology."¹³² Nothing could be further from the truth. As Arnold Dallimore reminds us, "Whitefield possessed a very real understanding of the doctrines of grace, not as an abstract system of thought, but as the teaching of the Scriptures and as the basic principles of his daily Christian life."¹³³ However, Stout does offer some useful insights, particularly in Whitefield's use of Scriptural language: "So ingrained was the influence of the apostle's language and peripatetic lifestyle on Whitefield's imagination that he virtually adopted Paul's persona for his own."¹³⁴

Frank Lambert, once a punter for the Pittsburgh Steelers, now a historian at Purdue University, explores the depths of commercial means that Whitefield used for publicity and places it within the context of the beginning of the consumer revolution. He

Whitefield," in *The Bible the Reformation and the Church: Essays in Honor of James Atkinson*, W. P. Stephens, ed. (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 169.

130 Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, 156.

131 Kidd, *George Whitefield America's Spiritual Founding Father*, 259.

132 Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, 39.

133 Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, vol. 1, 409.

134 Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, 56.

marks the beginning of Whitefield's conversion as that which authenticated his preaching: "Whitefield based his qualifications for proclaiming the necessity of the new birth on his acquaintance with 'experimental religion' not his mastery of prescribed theology."¹³⁵ He traces the use of merchandising practices to advance Whitefield's evangelistic goals. He argues that Whitefield introduced the language of market transactions in biblical terms: "It was a hard bargain, but Christ was willing to strike the bargain that you and I might not be damned forever."¹³⁶ He notes the changes that occur with the new birth begin on a spiritual level but extended to one's dress. He notes Whitefield's reaction upon seeing Jonathan Edwards's children wearing plain clothes as opposed to silks and satins.¹³⁷ Lambert identifies the challenge then and now, "how to reach an ever-expanding audience of anonymous strangers, most of whom he could not reach face-to-face."¹³⁸ Lambert articulates well the success that Whitefield experienced and how the established institutions bristled against his methods: "As Whitefield succeeded in generating unprecedented crowds, he raised the ire of those who opposed his violation of traditional ecclesiastical boundaries and clerical conduct."¹³⁹

135 Frank Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity: George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 15-20.

136 Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, 48.

137 Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, 49.

138 Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, 8.

139 Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, 93.

In Boston, Whitefield took out weekly advertisements of his preaching schedules and the results of such events in the paper, *Boston Weekly News-Letter*. One writer to the paper suggested that Whitefield needed to be reined in for his activities: “There was a very wholesome law in the province to discourage Pedlars in Trade,” and the time had arrived “to enact something for the discouragement of Pedlars in Divinity also.”¹⁴⁰

Lambert astutely notes what occurred here:

These outcries point to one of the greatest ironies of the Great Awakening: the Calvinist Whitefield embracing mass marketing. While Chauncy and other proto-unitarians rejected Whitefield’s Calvinism as narrow and decidedly unenlightened, they also denounced his innovative, rational adaptations of the latest commercial means to propagate his message to vast audiences.¹⁴¹

Lambert reflects on the change that occurred in Whitefield as shown in his fourth visit to the colonies: “When Whitefield embarked for Georgia aboard the *Antelope* in 1751, he was a different person from the young minister who had first sailed for America in 1737.”¹⁴²

Michael Haykin, a Baptist church historian, offers insights into Whitefield’s spirituality in his short volume, *The Revived Puritan*. He offers a helpful biography, a useful chronology, and numerous letters of Whitefield that highlight various aspects of

140 *Boston Weekly News-Letter*, April 22, 1742.

141 Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, 94.

142 Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, 199.

his spirituality.¹⁴³ He concludes the volume with several prayers of Whitefield for specific topics such as becoming a Christian and a prayer for Christian educators.¹⁴⁴

Few authors cover the groundswell of spiritual activity that was the First Great Awakening better than Mark Noll in *The Rise of Evangelicalism*. He illustrates the role that Whitefield played in the movement by opening the book with an account of Whitefield's visit to Boston on September 19, 1740.¹⁴⁵ He notes the breadth of Whitefield's influence:

Before the tour came to an end in late November, he would preach in seven of the American colonies, often two or three times a day, and to crowds regularly into the thousands. It is likely that the total number of his hearers in these ten weeks (with, of course, some attending several times) equaled at least half the population of these seven colonies.¹⁴⁶

He describes well the excitement around Whitefield on his visit to the colonies in 1740, noting Sarah Pierpont Edwards's description of his "Unforgettable presence." He reminds us of the scope of his ministry:

In all his activities, Whitefield combined an extraordinary disregard for inherited church traditions with a breathtaking entrepreneurial spirit. The willingness to innovate made him immensely popular in the colonies and also promoted among

¹⁴³ Michael G. Haykin, *The Revived Puritan: The Spirituality of George Whitefield* (Dundas: Joshua Press, 2000), 79. While the chronology is brief, it notes the various tours to America.

¹⁴⁴ Haykin, *The Revived Puritan*, 209, 217.

¹⁴⁵ Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 13.

¹⁴⁶ Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 13.

later American evangelicals a similar disregard for Christian traditions. Yet his late vision, quick actions and urge to create left an ambiguous legacy, since it was much easier for Whitefield to announce grand plans than to carry them through.¹⁴⁷

Noll treats the Free Grace controversy between Whitefield and John Wesley with balance, noting, “George Whitefield’s response to Wesley’s pamphlet inaugurated the most enduring theological conflict among evangelicals, the conflict between Arminian and Calvinist interpretations of Scripture on the nature, motive powers and implications of salvation.”¹⁴⁸ Whitefield’s position that Wesley was misreading the Bible is strengthened by his own words: “It is plain beyond all contradiction, that St. Paul, through the whole eighth [chapter] of Romans, is speaking of the privileges of those only who are really in Christ. ... Had any one a mind to prove the doctrine of *election*, as well as *final perseverance*, he could hardly wish for a text more fit for his purpose, than that which you have chosen to disprove it.”¹⁴⁹ He also notes Whitefield’s influence in evangelical preaching:

Whitefield was critical in this process (evangelical preaching emerging as a form of Christian proclamation), since he influenced so many people in so many places by what he said, as well as how he said it. Forthright preaching of repentance, the redemptive work of Christ, the necessity of faith and the privilege of holy living were Whitefield’s sermonic stock in trade.¹⁵⁰

147 Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 107.

148 Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 122.

149 Whitefield, *Journal*, 574.

150 Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 132.

Noll has a painting of the Old South Church, Newburyport, Massachusetts, hanging in the living room of his home.¹⁵¹

After Arnold Dallimore's work, it was twenty-five years before another exceptional hagiographical biography appeared. Ernest Johnston, a layman and Alford Institute Fellow, had access to 109 letters penned by Whitefield between 1737 and 1739, most written to early Methodists that Arnold Dallimore never knew existed. Johnston believed that this material, along with the corrected errors in Whitefield's *Journal*, offered readers "the untold part of Whitefield's massive life."¹⁵² Johnston traveled to numerous Whitefield sites, both across the Atlantic and in the United States, that Dallimore was not able to see. Johnston acknowledges Whitefield's faults, naming several of them.¹⁵³ He rarely mentions them again, choosing to focus on the labors for the Lord of the Grand Itinerant. While many details of Whitefield's sailing trips have been summarized into short accounts, Johnston provides details on all 13 trips he made across the Atlantic. He devotes an entire chapter in volume I, chapter six, "At Sea," to Whitefield's ministry at sea.¹⁵⁴ In addition, numerous other accounts from various

151 From a personal conversation with Mark Noll at Pembroke College, Oxford, England on June 26, 2014.

152 Johnston, *George Whitefield*, xix.

153 Johnston, *George Whitefield*, xxi.

154 See pages 59-73 of Volume I.

voyages are sprinkled throughout both volumes. He notes from Whitefield's *Journals*, "I suppose my dear friend has heard how affairs go on shipboard. I need only add that GOD makes his power to be known among those that sail with me, and there are great hopes of the captain's conversion. O pray that he may not be an almost, but an altogether Christian."¹⁵⁵

As Johnston recalls, God answered his prayer as the captain became a friend and supporter by requiring attendance at prayer service on board the ship.¹⁵⁶ Whitefield officiated at several funerals that first voyage, at least one infant baptism, and one wedding:

Went with Captain Whiting on board the *Amy*; read prayers and preached to above two hundred and twenty hearers, and married a couple who did not behave so well as I could wish. The bridegroom laughed several times in the midst of the solemnity, upon which I shut up my prayer book. He began to weep; and I preceded, and gave him and the bride a Bible, as the best present I could make them, and exhorted all to holiness of life. God gave them a hearing ear, and an obedient heart.¹⁵⁷

The first book to link Whitefield with the American revolution was *Forgotten Founding Father*, by Stephen Mansfield. He offers numerous short chapters on a wide variety of different parts of Whitefield's life. He reminds readers of Whitefield's delay aboard the

155 Johnston, *George Whitefield*, Vol. I, 64.

156 Johnston, *George Whitefield*, Vol. I, 64.

157 Johnston, *George Whitefield*, Vol. I, 71.

Whittaker, and John Wesley's note to him to return to London.¹⁵⁸ He concludes that if Whitefield had never gone to America, the Great Awakening there might never have happened. Then, had there been no great revival, there may well have been no American Revolution.¹⁵⁹ Mansfield reminds us of the different tact that Whitefield took from Wesley in Georgia, "Rather than dwell on past failings, he set out to win the Georgians—at home he was warned they were "full of devils"—and soon found that "America is not so horrid a place as it is represented to be.""¹⁶⁰

Mansfield notes the peculiar dynamics of Whitefield's romantic behavior and his marriage. Whitefield married a woman who was actually in love with Whitefield's evangelist friend, Howell Harris. When she was spurned by Harris, Elizabeth James was furious that he would suggest that she marry Whitefield, "If you were my own father you had no right of disposing me against my will."¹⁶¹ After four days of discussion, however, Whitefield proposed marriage, she accepted, and they married two weeks later.¹⁶²

Mansfield also includes a comment that Luke Tyerman made about Whitefield: "As odd a wooer as ever wooed."¹⁶³ His chapter on unity traces Whitefield's early practice. He notes the comments that many colonial American leaders said about Whitefield. George

158 Mansfield, *Forgotten Founding Father*, 68.

159 Mansfield, *Forgotten Founding Father*, 68.

160 Mansfield, *Forgotten Founding Father*, 69.

161 Mansfield, *Forgotten Founding Father*, 100.

162 Mansfield, *Forgotten Founding Father*, 100.

163 Mansfield, *Forgotten Founding Father*, 211.

Washington said, “Upon his lips the Gospel appears even to the coarsest of men as sweet and as true as, in fact, it is.”¹⁶⁴

In his book, *Accidental Revolutionary: George Whitefield, and the Creation of America*, Jerome Mahaffey, professor of history at Baylor University, notes Whitefield’s role in the founding of America:

Ultimately, I believe that Whitefield did not realize his messages would lead America to a separation from England. He simply sought to oppose corruption, highlight the abuse of power, and preserve the right of colonists to worship at the church of their choice. Whitefield was a reformer, not necessarily a revolutionary. But of all the colonial leaders and their ideas, if you remove Whitefield and his contribution, no one else had the message, popularity, and influence to shape American colonists into people who could declare independence.¹⁶⁵

His analysis of Whitefield’s 1745 tour of America offers helpful insights into the different aspects this tour had from Whitefield’s first tour in 1740. While Whitefield knew he would face opposition, he was also a changed man. His strategy was to approach this tour with what he called “another spirit.”¹⁶⁶ There is no doubt that his wife Elizabeth’s presence on this tour had a significant influence. Charges of immorality were not taken seriously against him and he did not give his critics anything new to work with on this tour.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Mansfield, *Forgotten Founding Father*, 255.

¹⁶⁵ Mahaffey, *Accidental Revolutionary: George Whitefield, and the Creation of America*, (Waco, TX: Baylor), 2011, xi.

¹⁶⁶ Mahaffey, *Accidental Revolutionary*, 85.

¹⁶⁷ Mahaffey, *Accidental Revolutionary*, 86.

Mahaffey traces the debate that waged in two popular papers. The *Boston Evening-Post* ran articles that challenged Whitefield and the revival, while the *Boston Gazette* offered support for him and the revival, including articles about where Whitefield preached, what the reaction had been to his sermons, and where he would preach next.¹⁶⁸ Each paper published the names of ministers who supported Whitefield or those who did not. Fifty ministers signed pledges to deny Whitefield entrance to their churches.¹⁶⁹ Mahaffey mentions Whitefield's "Britain's Mercies and Britain's Duties" sermon, which he preached in Philadelphia on August 24, 1746, following the failed Jacobite rebellion.¹⁷⁰ Whitefield immediately published the sermon, which sold four editions in Philadelphia and Boston, making him the most popular religious figure, in terms of sermons sold in 1746, in the colonies.¹⁷¹ He notes the popularity of Whitefield's publications in the 1740s, as he had 133 American publications consisting of 64 sermons, 31 journal editions, 34 works defending his doctrine, and four documents detailing his ministry finances.¹⁷² This description contrasts with Harry Stout's reporting on Whitefield's writing:

168 Mahaffey, *Accidental Revolutionary*, 86.

169 Mahaffey, *Accidental Revolutionary*, 86.

170 Mahaffey, *Accidental Revolutionary*, 106.

171 Mahaffey, *Accidental Revolutionary*, 106.

172 Mahaffey, *Accidental Revolutionary*, 65.

For all intents and purposes, Whitefield's ministry was exclusively oral. He adamantly refused to use written notes and sometimes even failed to select a Scripture text before entering the pulpit. When he prepared sermons for print they were inelegant and hurried. Typically they were written while on board ships to and from the New World. So pale were these texts alongside his actual performances that his friend and admirer (though never kindred spirit) Benjamin Franklin believed that "if he had never written anything ... his reputation might in that case have still been growing, even after his death, as (there) being nothing of his writing on which to found a censure and give him a lower character."¹⁷³

Mahaffey also notes two attempts on Whitefield's life. The first occurred in 1744, and he quotes Whitefield as follows: "As I was passing from the pulpit to the coach I felt my wig and hat to be almost off. I turned about, and observed a sword just touching my temples. A young rake, as I afterward found, was determined to stab me; but a gentleman, seeing the sword thrust near me, struck it up with his cane."¹⁷⁴ The second attempt on his life occurred while Whitefield was in a pub where had rented a room. A man visited Whitefield seeking spiritual guidance.¹⁷⁵ The encounter took a turn for the worse as the man began to curse at Whitefield and then beat him with a brass-headed cane.¹⁷⁶ Another man joined the attacker and ,if it were not for the landlady and her daughter who scared the men off, it is likely that Whitefield would have died from the attack. It took several months for him to recover.¹⁷⁷ Mahaffey notes the unifying force that Whitefield was in the colonies:

¹⁷³ Stout, *The New England Soul*, 192.

¹⁷⁴ Mahaffey, *Accidental Revolutionary*, 75.

¹⁷⁵ Mahaffey, *Accidental Revolutionary*, 80.

¹⁷⁶ Mahaffey, *Accidental Revolutionary*, 80.

¹⁷⁷ Mahaffey, *Accidental Revolutionary*, 80.

Physically, Whitefield brought people together. Living in their own communities and neighborhoods, the colonists did not have a cause that would call them to one location. While leaders often met together for colonial business, the citizens did not. Whitefield changed all that by providing a place where people came on equal footing to consider his message. The importance of breaking down the physical and social class barriers between people must not be overlooked. People tend to trust those with whom they spend time and share beliefs. In Whitefield's events, people of diverse national and religious origins had the opportunity to worship together, and this encouraged the development of other public meetings.¹⁷⁸

He concludes by noting that colonists viewed Whitefield as a symbol of American patriotism.¹⁷⁹ He notes the support that many colonial leaders voiced for Whitefield, including John Adams who declared, "I know of no philosopher, or theologian, or moralist, ancient or modern, more profound, more infallible than Whitefield."¹⁸⁰ Mahaffey reminds the reader:

The revolution was still thirty-one years away, so the audiences hearing the messages were the parents of those who actually fought in the Revolution making Whitefield's direct influence one step removed. But his teachings held incredible power as parents taught their children the difference between right and wrong, good and evil.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Mahaffey, *Accidental Revolutionary*, 80.

¹⁷⁹ Mahaffey, *Accidental Revolutionary*, 224.

¹⁸⁰ Mahaffey, *Accidental Revolutionary*, 225.

¹⁸¹ Mahaffey, *Accidental Revolutionary*, 103.

He notes the spiritual results of the Great Awakening, observing that “one hundred and fifty new churches had been started in New England as a result of the Great Awakening.”¹⁸² Mahaffey reminds the reader that despite being a generation before the Revolution, “Whitefield offered and persuaded colonists to an American identity birthed in conversion. He prescribed beliefs connecting France, Rome, and hell. Finally, he encouraged people to adopt political beliefs about arbitrary power and civil liberties.”¹⁸³

An engaging study of the pulpit and print ministries of Rev. Whitefield and his eighteenth-century itinerant field-preaching contemporary John Wesley, is Ian Maddock’s *Men of One Book*. There are a multitude of books that cover each of these preachers. Dr. Maddock’s volume tackles the formidable task of comparing both Whitefield’s and Wesley’s field-preaching ministries, sermons preached, use of Scripture, and core doctrines. He notes the brief attention that has been paid to the influence of Scripture on Whitefield’s sermons.¹⁸⁴

He articulates clearly the motivation that both evangelists felt to proclaim the Gospel. Noting the decision Whitefield made early in his ministry to obey ecclesiastical authority or heed to his divine mandate, he knew he had to preach to “sheep having no shepherd.” He defines the bounds of his ministry, “Quite simply, Whitefield understood the scope of his mission to be as boundless as that of the God whom he served.”¹⁸⁵ No

182 Mahaffey, *Accidental Revolutionary*, 143.

183 Mahaffey, *Accidental Revolutionary*, 175.

184 Maddock, *Men of One Book*, 18.

185 Maddock, *Men of One Book*, 41.

volume compares the field-preaching ministries of the two men more comprehensively than this one. Maddock notes the global call that both men felt, noting that both note, “the World is my parish,” though often it is only Wesley who is credited with such an utterance.¹⁸⁶ In fact, it was in Whitefield’s writings that it first appeared, “The whole world is now my parish. Wheresoever my master calls me, I am ready to go and preach his everlasting gospel.”¹⁸⁷ Luke Tyerman attributes the use of this phrase to a general slogan used by members of the Holy Club at Oxford, and not necessarily a direct quote by either Whitefield or Wesley, as many often see it:

In the month of June, 1739, in a letter to a friend, Wesley made use of the memorable declaration, which has been quoted times without number, “I look upon all the world as my parish.” In the following extract, Whitefield employs the same expression, thus shewing(sic) that it was not peculiar to Wesley, but common among the Oxford Methodists, “The whole world is now my parish. Wheresoever my Master calls me, I am ready to go and preach His everlasting gospel.”¹⁸⁸

As the three hundredth anniversary of Whitefield’s birth approached, several authors prepared volumes to be released in that year, 2014. The first of these was Steven Lawson’s *The Evangelistic Zeal of George Whitefield*. Continuing in the same vein as

¹⁸⁶ Maddock, *Men of One Book*. In 1739 both men write this phrase in letters. It appears in Whitefield’s letters before it appears in Wesley’s letters. Maddock notes that on page 41.

¹⁸⁷ Whitefield, *Letters*, 105.

¹⁸⁸ Tyerman, *The Life of George Whitefield*, Vol. I, 316.

Arnold Dallimore, Lawson, a Baptist pastor and founder of One Passion Ministries, holds Whitefield in the highest regard, “If I could be anyone in church history, I would be George Whitefield.”¹⁸⁹ In the first chapter he declares, “Reaching from one side of the Atlantic to the other, the expansive ministry of George Whitefield (1714-1770) remains unmatched to this day.”¹⁹⁰ His focus is primarily the theology of Whitefield and its effects on his ministry. He traces the trajectory of Whitefield’s personal piety from prayer to preaching.

Lawson excels at showing how the doctrines of grace lay the foundation for Whitefield’s ministry. He articulates well the consistency of Whitefield’s Calvinistic theology with a desire for souls won for Christ. He plumbs the depths of Whitefield’s convictions, articulating the wellspring of his that he believed he was delivering divine truth each time he preached.¹⁹¹ He describes the occasion that David Hume, the Scottish philosopher, was asked why he was going to hear Whitefield preach, if Hume himself did not believe the gospel, “I don’t, but he does.”¹⁹² He notes the financial stress that Whitefield labored under, and the odd providence that occurred in its wake. Whitefield instructed his wife Elizabeth to leave London with four-month-old John and move to a cottage in Wales to reduce expenses. They traveled in an unheated stage coach and John

189 Lawson, *The Evangelistic Zeal of George Whitefield*, xv.

190 Lawson, *The Evangelistic Zeal of George Whitefield*, 1.

191 Lawson, *The Evangelistic Zeal of George Whitefield*, 94.

192 Lawson, *The Evangelistic Zeal of George Whitefield*, 96.

became ill with a cold, and died. They had stopped at the inn his mother operated, the very inn that George himself was born, that his son died in.¹⁹³ Lawson provides few new insights into Whitefield, yet has plumbed the depths of numerous authors to provide an accessible and quick-read introduction to Whitefield.

Later that year, Thomas Kidd, history professor at Baylor University, published his work *George Whitefield: America's Spiritual Founding Father*. His aim was to offer a scholarly biography that places Whitefield within the environment of the early evangelical movement.¹⁹⁴ He carefully articulates the connection that Whitefield makes with Jesus, alluding to the fact that he was born in an inn, while Jesus was born in a manger attached to an inn.¹⁹⁵ Whitefield included this in the original version of his journal, but then removed it in subsequent printings.¹⁹⁶

Tracing Whitefield's journey from a broken home in Gloucester, England to his days as a student at Oxford, Kidd reminds the reader of his struggles, "In Whitefield's world, conversion to faith in Jesus Christ was no polite, simple affair. You did not just walk an aisle and ask Jesus to come into your heart. It was a titanic spiritual struggle—the defining struggle of one's life—to find out whether God or the devil would ultimately

193 Lawson, *The Evangelistic Zeal of George Whitefield*, 21.

194 Kidd, *George Whitefield America's Spiritual Founding Father*, 5.

195 Kidd, *George Whitefield America's Spiritual Founding Father*, 5.

196 George Whitefield, *A Short Account of God's Dealings with the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield* (London, 1740), 8.

command your soul's allegiance."¹⁹⁷ He traces Whitefield's depravity, recounting his stealing from his mother as a boy, noting Whitefield wrote, "If I trace myself from my cradle to my manhood, I see nothing in me but a fitness to be damned."¹⁹⁸

Kidd reminds us of the journey that Whitefield took toward sanctification, "Continuing to plumb the depths of spiritual discipline, Whitefield finally decided to repudiate plays and the theater. One day while fasting, Whitefield grabbed a copy of a play in order to read a funny passage to a classmate. Then "God struck my heart with such power, that I was obliged to lay it down again."¹⁹⁹ Noting his aim in the introduction, "Yet I hope that I have also been fair to his critics and transparent about his obvious failings as a man and minister," Kidd reminds readers of the challenges that Whitefield and his wife Elizabeth endured in their almost twenty-seven year marriage.²⁰⁰ Kidd's conclusions about Whitefield's life and ministry are a concise summation of the lasting effects of his influence upon the first generation of evangelical Christianity.

In June 2014, forty scholars presented papers at an international conference intended to remember and reflect on the ministry of Rev. Whitefield. Held at Whitefield's alma mater, Pembroke College, Oxford University, it was entitled "George Whitefield at 300." Sixteen papers from the conference were compiled by editors Geordan Hammond and David Ceri Jones for the volume, *George Whitefield: Life, Context, and Legacy*. The

197 Kidd, *George Whitefield America's Spiritual Founding Father*, 20.

198 Kidd, *George Whitefield America's Spiritual Founding Father*, 11.

199 Kidd, *George Whitefield America's Spiritual Founding Father*, 25.

200 Kidd, *George Whitefield America's Spiritual Founding Father*, 245.

topics in this volume are wide-ranging and offer perhaps the most in-depth look ever at many areas of Whitefield's life. They include Whitefield's early life, his life at sea, how he has been remembered, and the acoustic power of his voice.

Boyd Stanley Schlenther explores the unrefined areas of Whitefield's life, his difficulty with relationships, his mood, and his temperament. He records Whitefield struggling with pride, writing in his journal after his graduation from Oxford, "O proud Whitefield proud Whitefield God humble thee."²⁰¹ While many critics thought that Whitefield had a huge ego, Whitefield himself felt that God was blessing his ministry. Schlenther notes Whitefield's observation that he, like Jesus, had been born in an inn, "God has Set His seal to my Ministry."²⁰²

Of particular note is Stephen Berry's article entitled "Whitefield and the Atlantic." While all Whitefield biographers note his trans-Atlantic travels, most see them as a means to an end, to simply transport the evangelist from one side of the Atlantic to the other for his next sermon. Aside from the occasional anecdote from aboard ship or the dates he left or arrived, little has been written about Whitefield's travels. Stephen Mansfield has a short three-page chapter entitled, "The Sea," in which he notes that sea travel became more than simply getting to the next preaching point, "It became a voyage

²⁰¹ Boyd Stanley Schlenther, "Whitefield's Personal Life and Character," in *George Whitefield: Life, Context and Legacy*, Gordon Hammond and David Ceri Jones, eds. (Oxford: 2016), 20.

²⁰² Schlenther, 20.

into revelation, a grand symbolic drama played out on the vast blue stage of the sea.”²⁰³ Ernest Johnston notes the various ships Whitefield sailed on, with letters from each trip. In fact, he spent more than two of his fifty-five years of life aboard ship.²⁰⁴ Berry notes that if one combines all the time he spent sailing along the British and American coasts, it amounts to nearly three years, and approximately eight percent of his adult ministerial career.²⁰⁵ He offers four metaphors for the ship; the ship as parish, the ship as wilderness, the ship as cloister, and the ship as haven.²⁰⁶ Berry’s insight into eighteenth-century sailing explains numerous notations in Whitefield’s *Journals*. Eighteenth-century sailing ships often took weeks to embark their port of origin. They were dependent on wind and tide conditions which could keep them close to shore for days, and on occasion weeks at a time. Although Whitefield went aboard the *Whitaker*, for his first transatlantic voyage on December 30, 1737, it was not until February 2, 1738 that the vessel freed itself from England’s shores.²⁰⁷ It was his custom to frequently lodge on shore, sometimes for several days at a time. In so doing, he ran the risk of being left behind. Berry notes that the phrase, “went (or came) on board ship” appeared eighteen times in his journal, as the *Whitaker* waited to leave the coast of England.²⁰⁸ Regarding the ship as parish, it was as

203 Mansfield, *Forgotten Founding Father*, 174.

204 Stephen Berry, “Whitefield and the Atlantic,” Hammond and Jones, 207.

205 Berry, “Whitefield and the Atlantic,” 207.

206 Berry, “Whitefield and the Atlantic,” 208.

207 Berry, “Whitefield and the Atlantic,” 209.

208 Berry, “Whitefield and the Atlantic,” 209.

rough and tumble as any parish could be, perhaps more so. In the eighteenth century not every captain would permit worship services to be held on board. Whitefield's third trip to America in 1744 was delayed as "the captain, in whose ship I was to sail from hence, would not take me, for fear of my spoiling his sailors."²⁰⁹ Another captain believed that Whitefield distracted sailors on board from their ship bound duties, and as a result, was responsible for a collision of two convoy ships during the War of Jenkins Ear (1739-48), "this is your praying and be damned to you!"²¹⁰

Berry describes what the ship-board parish was like for Whitefield, "Like a parish clergyman, Whitefield established the habit of making "regular visitations to disciple his flock. He organized the passengers into different groups—women, soldiers, children, etc.—to catechize them."²¹¹ He notes that just as on the mainland, Whitefield encountered resistance to his ministry on board ship, "This opposition ranged from theological disputation to open threats of violence. The ship, however, removed the cloak of anonymity of press and mob. The tight confines and limited social sphere meant that Whitefield personally knew his shipboard opponents."²¹² On one occasion, Whitefield describes how he used physical force on an unruly boy who refused to pray, "After I had given him several blows, he said his prayer as well as could be expected, and I gave him

209 Whitefield to Mrs. D. (26 June 1744), *Works*, 2:59.

210 Whitefield to Mr. (20 October 1744), *Works*, 2:67.

211 Berry, "Whitefield and the Atlantic," 212.

212 Berry, "Whitefield and the Atlantic," 212.

some figs for a reward.”²¹³ In contrast, Kidd notes the typical interaction when boisterous boys engaged Whitefield after open-air sermons with the force of the mob behind them, often resulting in him being physically attacked.²¹⁴

Although he enjoyed the ministry aboard the *Whitaker*, his experience was not the same aboard the *Mary*, on his return to England in September of 1738. There were far fewer people aboard, rendering the ship as wilderness for Whitefield, as he describes it, “My sphere of Action is now contracted into a very narrow Compass.”²¹⁵ Berry notes that Whitefield seldom suffered from seasickness on board ship, though he did on occasion suffer as Whitefield called it, “My bodily indisposition still increased.”²¹⁶ Berry notes that Whitefield saw the ship as cloister by Whitefield as he frequently used the term “retirement” to refer to his life aboard ship.²¹⁷ Near the end of his life, Whitefield remarked on the connection between land and sea, “Sea is sea, land is land. The God whom we serve, is God of both.”²¹⁸

Braxton Boren’s article “Whitefield’s Voice” offers an intriguing exploration into the power and range of one of the world’s most powerful orators. Like Benjamin

213 Whitefield, *Journal*, 49.

214 Kidd, *George Whitefield America’s Spiritual Founding Father*, 82, 148, 177.

215 Berry, “Whitefield and the Atlantic,” 213.

216 Berry, “Whitefield and the Atlantic,” 214.

217 To learn more about Whitefield’s and other evangelist’s ministry aboard ship see Stephen Berry’s, *A Path in the Mighty Waters*, 2015.

218 Berry, “Whitefield and the Atlantic,” 223.

Franklin, who doubted the accounts he heard that Whitefield could address crowds of 30,000 people or more in London, Boren explores whether it would have been physically possible for Whitefield to preach unamplified to crowds the size he and others claimed he did.²¹⁹ He uses Franklin's measured data, combined with modern understandings of sound propagation and psychoacoustics to estimate the sound pressure level (SPL) of Whitefield's voice and along with historical and archeological research, acoustic modeling and laboratory measurements, to attempt to complete Franklin's testing if he were doing it today.²²⁰ His goal was simple:

Using modern simulation techniques and Franklin's data, it is possible to model eighteenth-century Philadelphia to calculate how loud Whitefield's voice would have been during Franklin's experiment. This information may then be used to insert a virtual Whitefield into a model of his largest crowds in London, stimulating how many people could have heard his unamplified voice at any one time and allowing of measure for the accuracy of Franklin's original calculation.²²¹

Boren considered factors such as temperature and weather conditions, distraction noise such as from horse drawn carriages, and the reflective surfaces of Market Street in Philadelphia such as the brick streets, wooden doors, and glass windows.²²² Using

219 Boren, "George Whitefield's Voice," 167.

220 Boren, "George Whitefield's Voice," 169.

221 Boren, "George Whitefield's Voice," 168.

222 Boren, "George Whitefield's Voice," 172.

AutoCAD, a computer modeling program, he was able to make a 2D drawing of historic Market Street in Philadelphia, where Franklin conducted his experiment while Whitefield preached.²²³ Boren notes that Franklin had no known hearing loss and was a youthful age thirty-three when he conducted the experiment, so barring any unknown hearing concerns, he likely would have been able to hear Whitefield easily.²²⁴ He carefully analyzes the accuracy of the original crowd estimates of those gathered to hear Whitefield preach.

Both Dallimore and Stout believed that the reported numbers should be reduced by one-half.²²⁵ Lambert does not doubt Franklin's numbers. Boren concludes that aside from Franklin's overly generous use of his density calculation, Franklin's numbers are generally reliable:

When it is considered in the context of the hundreds of large crowds he attracted over his lifetime, Whitefield probably spoke directly to more individuals than any unamplified orator in history.²²⁶ Whitefield declared in 1739 that, 'the Christian world is in a deep sleep. Nothing but a loud voice can waken them out of it!'"²²⁷

In August of 2014, "The Whitefield Symposium" was held at George Whitefield College in Cape Town, South Africa to commemorate the 300th Anniversary of

223 Boren, "George Whitefield's Voice," 173.

224 Boren, "George Whitefield's Voice," 175.

225 Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol. I, 269

226 Boren, "George Whitefield's Voice," 188.

227 Boren, "George Whitefield's Voice," 189.

Whitefield's birth. The lectures given at that event have been compiled in the volume, *The Genius of George Whitefield: Reflections on his ministry from 21st Century Africa*. The preface by Thomas Kidd is worth reading by itself. The most intriguing essay in this volume is "The Pastoral Sermons of George Whitefield" by Victor Emma-Adamah and Phumezo Masango. While they acknowledge Whitefield's evangelistic fervor, they make a compelling case for the pastoral component in Whitefield's sermons through an analysis of several sermons. The first sermon, preached on May 19th, 1739 on Kennington Common, in London, "The Care of the Soul Urged as the One Thing Needful."

James Schenk offers another short, accessible volume, *George Whitefield: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought*. The book is two parts: first a quick look at his origins and ministry, then a tour of Whitefield in print, including significant letters and several sermons. Schenk is one of few authors to note the presence of Whitefield's thumb in the archives of Drew University in Madison, New Jersey.²²⁸ This fact was confirmed to me when one of the librarians at the Drew University Library visited the Old South Church, and commented to me, "Yes, we have his thumb."²²⁹

228 James Schenk, *George Whitefield: A Guided Tour of His Life and Ministry* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2015), 100.

229 From a personal conversation with Jody Caldwell, in Newburyport, MA, on October 12, 2007.

In one of the latest works to be published, *Inventing George Whitefield: Race, Revivalism, and the Making of a Religious Icon*, Jessica Parr considers Whitefield's role as a religious icon of the British Atlantic World and explores his influence on evangelical beliefs about slavery, race, and religion. Parr is one of few writers who provides details about Whitefield's funeral, noting the cost, the pallbearers, and the attendance.²³⁰

Randy Peterson plumbs the depths of the relationship between George Whitefield and Ben Franklin in his engaging volume, *Ben Franklin, George Whitefield, and The Surprising Friendship That Invented America*. After noting the differences between the two men, including how far apart they were in personal faith in Jesus Christ, he answers the question, "How on earth did these two very different men become friends?"²³¹ While the spiritual differences have been noted before, Peterson details the differences based on correspondence between the two beginning in 1740.

After completing a PhD in "The Evangelistic Preaching of the 18th Century Awakening Leaders," Baptist pastor Dan Nelson set his heart on learning more about George Whitefield.²³² It took him twelve years to publish, *A Burning and Shining Light:*

²³⁰ Parr, 119. The funeral expenses, which included construction of the tomb under the pulpit of the Old South Church, Newburyport, MA were around 50 pounds sterling. The Rev. Dr. Haven of Portsmouth, NH, the Rev. Rodgers of Exeter, NH, the Rev. Jewett from Rowley, MA, the Rev. Chandler of Rowley, MA, the Rev. Moses Parsons of Newbury (Byfield), MA and the Rev. Bass of Newburyport, 104 couples attended the funeral procession, joining 5,000 people at the funeral.

²³¹ Randy Peterson, *The Printer and the Preacher: Ben Franklin, George Whitefield, and the Surprising Friendship That Invented America* (Nashville: Nelson, 2015), 3.

²³² After earning a Doctor of Ministry degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary he earned a Doctor of Philosophy from California Graduate School of Theology.

The Testimony and Witness of George Whitefield. Another excellent work that follows in the series of hagiography. Once one overlooks the error in the first sentence of the introduction, this book offers a well-researched treatment of Whitefield.²³³ Unlike many biographers of Whitefield, Nelson, offers an engaging chapter of “Lasting Contributions of George Whitefield.” He clearly articulates the legacy that Whitefield left and how it affects those of us living out the gospel in these days. Lastly, he offers a “Glossary of Terms” which provides a helpful context for any student of Whitefield.²³⁴

The latest volume to be published is Peter Choi’s study, *George Whitefield: Evangelist for God and Empire*. Choi places Whitefield’s ministry in context, “The second phase of Whitefield’s transatlantic work from 1741 to 1754 occurred during a time of ecclesiastical fracturing, national insecurity, and imperial war.”²³⁵

This review of the literature written both by Whitefield himself and written about him by others, has been a critical step in identifying some of the characteristics that numerous authors have noted as being significant in his life and ministry. Now that the literature about Whitefield has been surveyed, the project of identifying the spiritual qualities that are admired of Whitefield will be conducted. In so doing, a comparison will

233 Nelson places Connecticut farmer Nathan Cole as being from Middleton, New Jersey instead of being from Berlin, Connecticut and traveling to Middleton, CT where Whitefield was preaching. Nelson quotes from Dallimore who correctly places the farmer traveling to Middleton, Connecticut, in a well-documented account.18.

234 Nelson, *A Burning and Shining Light*, 283.

235 Peter Choi, *George Whitefield: Evangelist for God and Empire* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 80.

be made of what spiritual qualities are admired in Whitefield today with what has been admired, and what impact that has for ministry today.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN AND OUTCOMES

Having explained the interest in Whitefield, established the theological and Biblical framework, and discussed both the writings of Whitefield and the literature following his death, I will now introduce the project design and outcomes. This chapter will discuss the survey and interviews used to identify, from the perspective of contemporary Christians, the impact and legacy that Whitefield has had on them and their ministries, in an effort to determine the characteristics of Whitefield that are still admired today. I will discuss and interact with the charts and graphs to determine characteristics about the participants, such as how long they have been Christians, how long they had been familiar with Whitefield's ministry, and what characteristics they admire in him.

Project Methodology

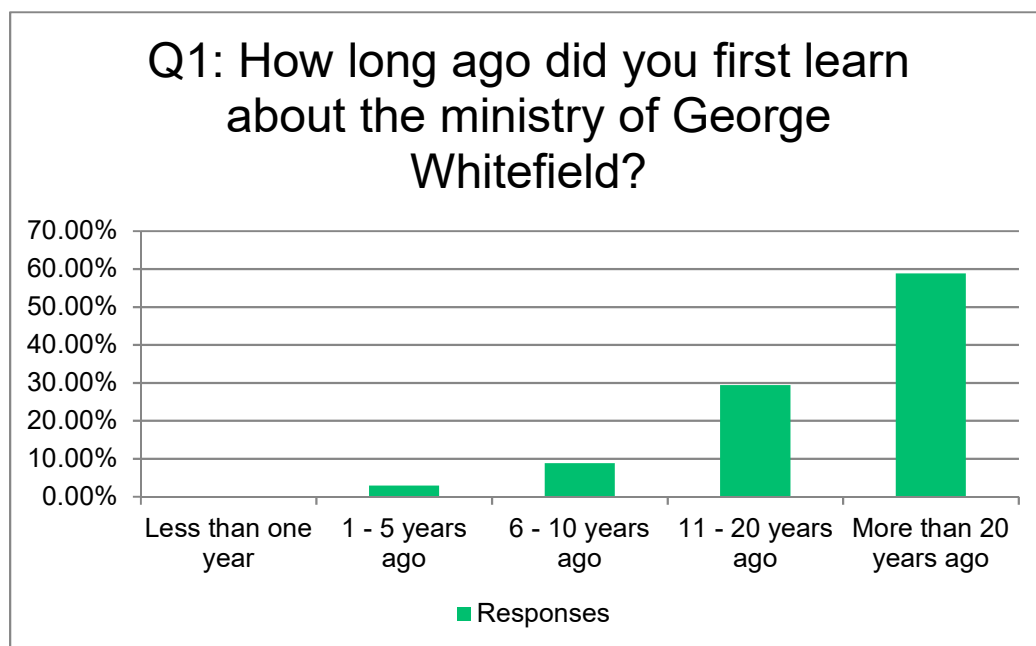
Having reviewed the literature in Chapter Three, it was obvious that numerous authors had spilled a great deal of ink offering biographical details about Whitefield, his sermons, letters, and theology. Some offered suggestions as to what they personally admired in Whitefield, at the conclusion of their work. For most, this comprised a page or two of the entire work. No work offered a survey of Christians to determine what is

admired in Whitefield by Christians living over two-hundred and forty-eight years after his ministry concluded. In consultation with Dr. Bryan Auday, Chair of the Department of Psychology, Gordon College, Wenham, Massachusetts, one survey and one set of interview questions were developed to survey forty people and interview five individuals, to determine what characteristics are admired in Whitefield today.

The survey was sent via email to forty people. The participants were selected from those who had visited Old South Church when I served as pastor there from 2003 to 2014. The vast majority of the participants are pastors or missionaries. I sent the survey to those that I had contact information for. Participants were informed of their rights in participation, that it was voluntary, and no compensation was offered for their participation. By participating, their consent was given. The survey was set up to be confidential so that neither the researcher or the consultant knew who responded. The ten questions were designed to be brief to maximize participation. Thirty-four participants responded, for an eighty-five percent response rate. The survey was developed to determine how long a participant had known about the ministry of Whitefield. The majority of the participants, twenty, had known about the ministry of Whitefield more than twenty years, which predated their relationship with the researcher. Ten respondents indicated they had known about his ministry for between eleven and twenty years. Three respondents noted they had known about his ministry for six to ten years. One indicated they had known about his ministry for one to five years. Many of the respondents were

pastors or missionaries, so it is not surprising that a majority of them had known about Whitefield for more than twenty years.

Figure 1: Question 1



All but one of the participants, a total of thirty-three, indicated they have been a Christian for more than twenty years. One indicated they had been a Christian for eleven to twenty years.

Figure 2: Question 2

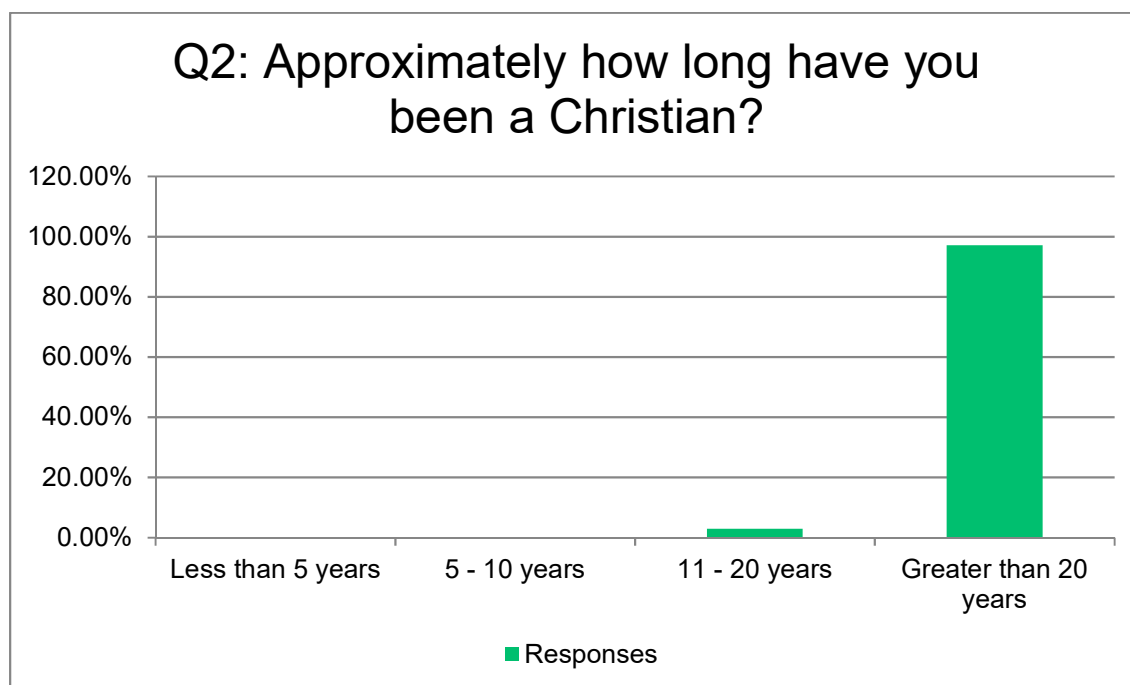
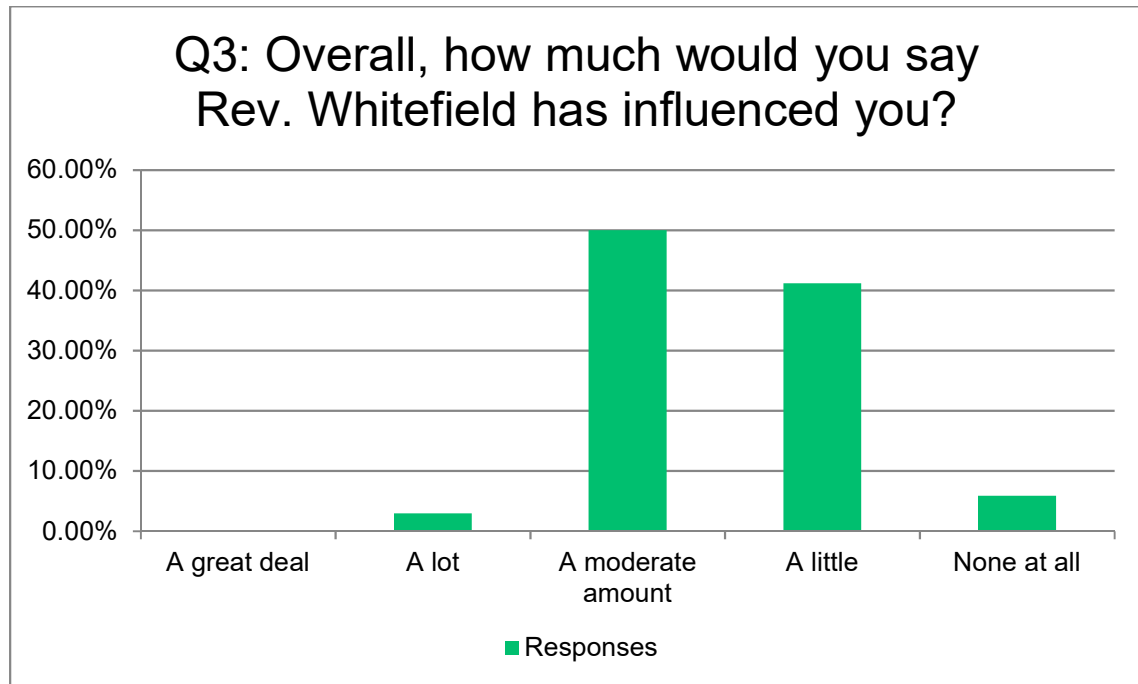


Figure 3: Question 3

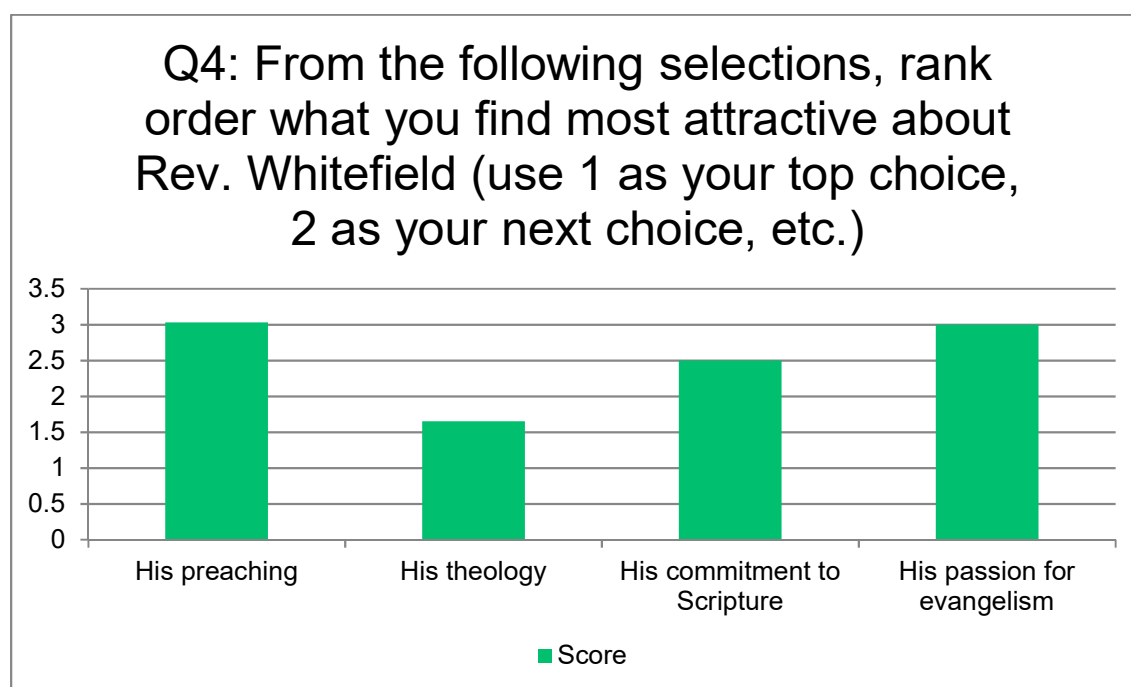


Question Three

Participants were asked how much Whitefield has influenced them. None of the participants indicated he had influenced them a great deal. This was surprising in that when Whitefield traveled throughout the colonies, he affected thousands of people, many of whom became Christians, and their spiritual lives changed upon hearing Whitefield preach. Perhaps the answers to this question are reflected in the fact that all but one of the participants have been Christians more than twenty years. In addition, Whitefield was an evangelist, focusing his sermons on those who had not yet known Jesus as their Savior. One participant indicated that Whitefield had influenced them a lot. Half of the

participants, seventeen, indicated he had influenced them a moderate amount. Fourteen participants indicated he had influenced them a little. Two indicated he had not influenced them at all.

Figure 4: Question 4



Question 4 asked participants to rank order what they found as the most attractive about Whitefield. The choices offered were: his preaching, his theology, his commitment to Scripture, and his passion for evangelism. Fifteen participants ranked his preaching as the most attractive. Twelve ranked his passion for evangelism as most attractive.

When ranked, his preaching had the highest ranked score, followed by his passion for evangelism, his commitment to Scripture, and finally his theology. Fifteen participants ranked his preaching most attractive, despite the fact that none of them have ever heard him preach a sermon either in-person or recorded. It is hard to know if any of those who ranked preaching as the most attractive have actually read one of Whitefield's sermons.

Question 5

If there is something you find attractive about Reverend Whitefield that was not listed in the previous question, what would that be? (note: the previously listed options were preaching, theology, commitment to Scripture, and passion for evangelism)

Answered: 23

Skipped: 11

#

RESPONSES

Physical sacrifice in reference to the amount of miles traveled & sermons preached.

piety - valuing the conversion of the heart

His perseverance preaching on steps of his home while near death!

zeal for preaching

His friendship with Jonathan Edwards

The way he trained for preaching, e.g. putting pebbles in his mouth, making himself heard above the roar of the surf, etc.

I am so much more a fan of John Wesley. Whitefield said, "My preaching has been a rope of sand." Wesley said, "My Preaching would have been a rope of sand if I had not put the people in class meetings." If you want more on class meetings write me back. He was critical of the local clergy. Anyway, some of the converts formed splinter groups. He was Spurgeon's hero so he must have been better than I think. Wesley was such a better organizer.

His godly modesty

His ability to draw great crowds. Willingness to preach outdoors

None

Getting along with those who were theologically different.

The challenges he faced as an evangelist.

His connection to the Great Awakening

His commitment to ministry as seen in the number of times he traversed the Atlantic!

Also, the fact that his arm and thumb were posthumously separated from his body are details of intrigue.

His public ministry, in that he was an evangelical preacher with solid Scriptural bases theology that was very public. His public persona provided an additional platform for his ministry but also added some pressure.

I enjoy the history around his time period. His mark he left as God's servant in the revival of that time.

Christian friendship with others

His integrity in ministry and commitment to orthodoxy.

His pioneer spirit to travel and reach the lost

personality

his perseverance

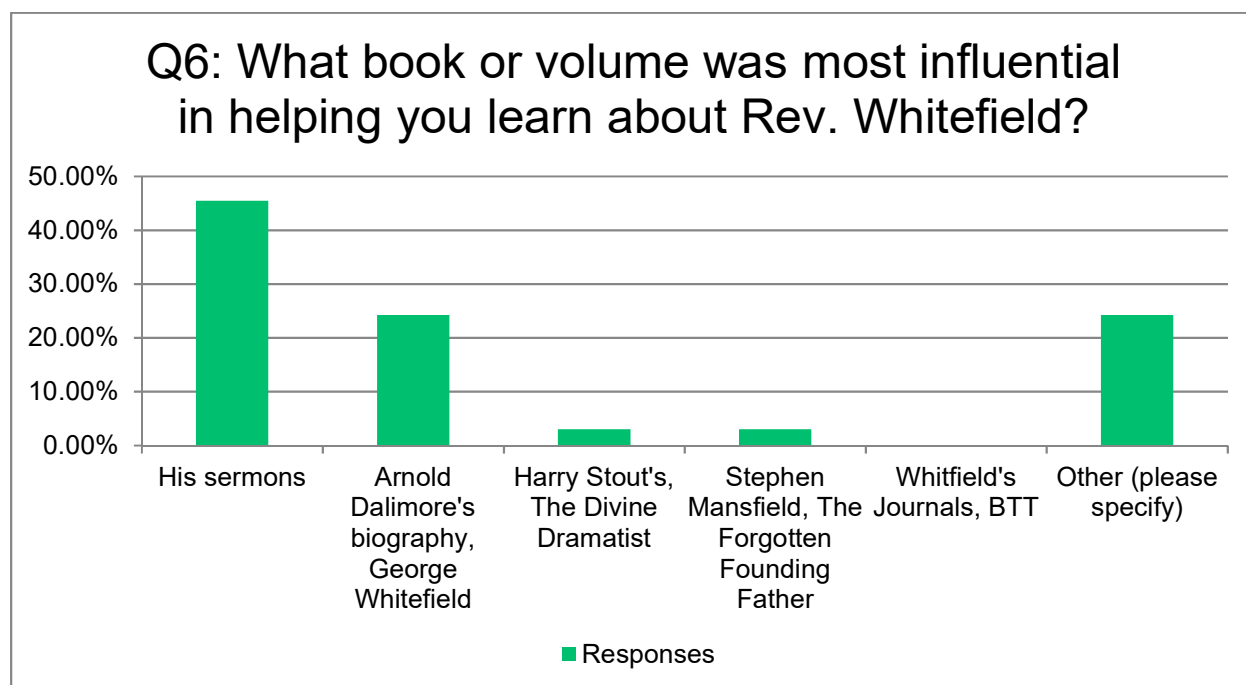
Connection with Wesley and Franklin.

Willingness to go great distances to preach and teach.

Participants were asked to list a characteristic of Whitefield that they found attractive that was not listed in the previous question. Twenty-three out of 34 respondents listed something. Eleven skipped the question. While 23 offered responses, one of the responses was “None” so in reality there were only 22 responses. One noted Whitefield’s ecumenical approach. As Peter Choi notes, “He was a lifelong Anglican with interdenominational connections who embodied a spirit of cooperation. He courted allies across the theological spectrum, from German Moravians and Pennsylvania Quakers, to Scottish presbyters and English bishops.”²³⁶

²³⁶ Peter Choi, *Whitefield and the Quest for Bethesda College*, Hammond, 227.

Figure 5: Question 6



Participants were asked what book or volume was most influential in helping them learn about Rev. Whitefield. Thirty-three of the 34 respondents answered, with only one skipping the item. Forty-five percent of the respondents indicated that Whitefield's own sermons were influential in helping them learn about him. In the modern era, many fail to remember Whitefield for his publications. In fact, he went on a publishing rampage in his twenties. Bruce Hindmarsh notes his prolific writing:

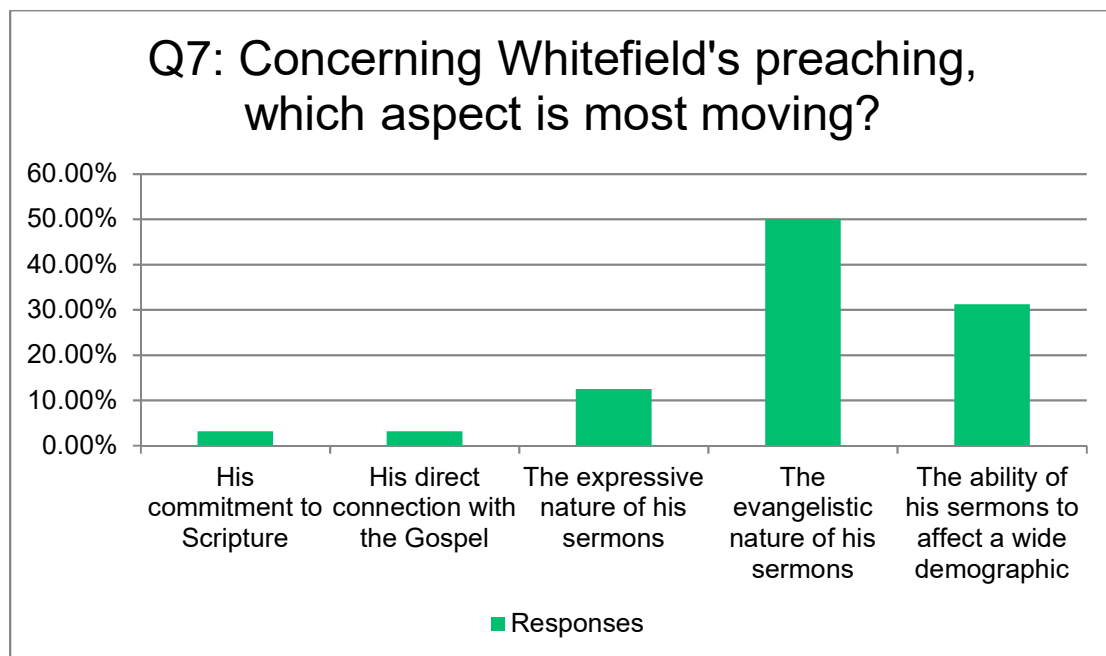
He published fifty-two individual sermons during this decade (compared with only seven thereafter), eight volumes of collected sermons (compared with only four more later), and twenty-eight other items (compared with sixteen afterwards).

By title, this means that more than three quarters of his publications appeared in his twenties.²³⁷

Arnold Dallimore's biography, *George Whitefield* was the second most mentioned volume. The Banner of Truth Trust has published Whitefield's sermons, as well as the recently released two volume set by Lee Gatiss, adding to those sermons available on the Internet, making for increased accessibility to Whitefield's sermons.

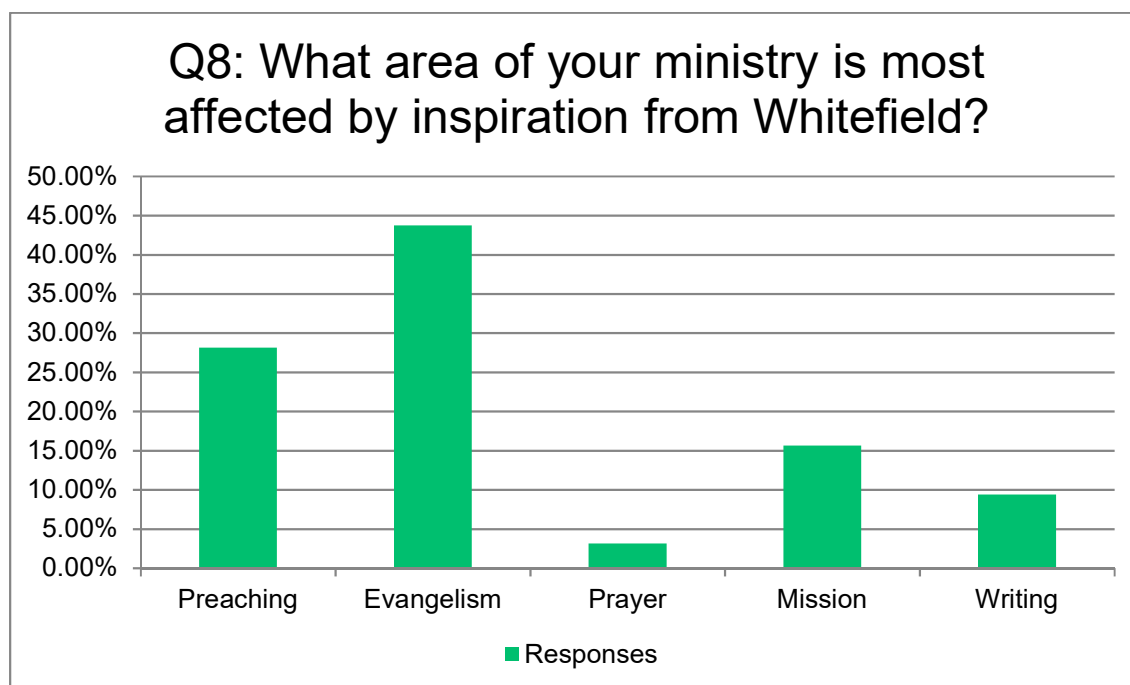
²³⁷ Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Spirit of Early Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 10.

Figure 6: Question 7



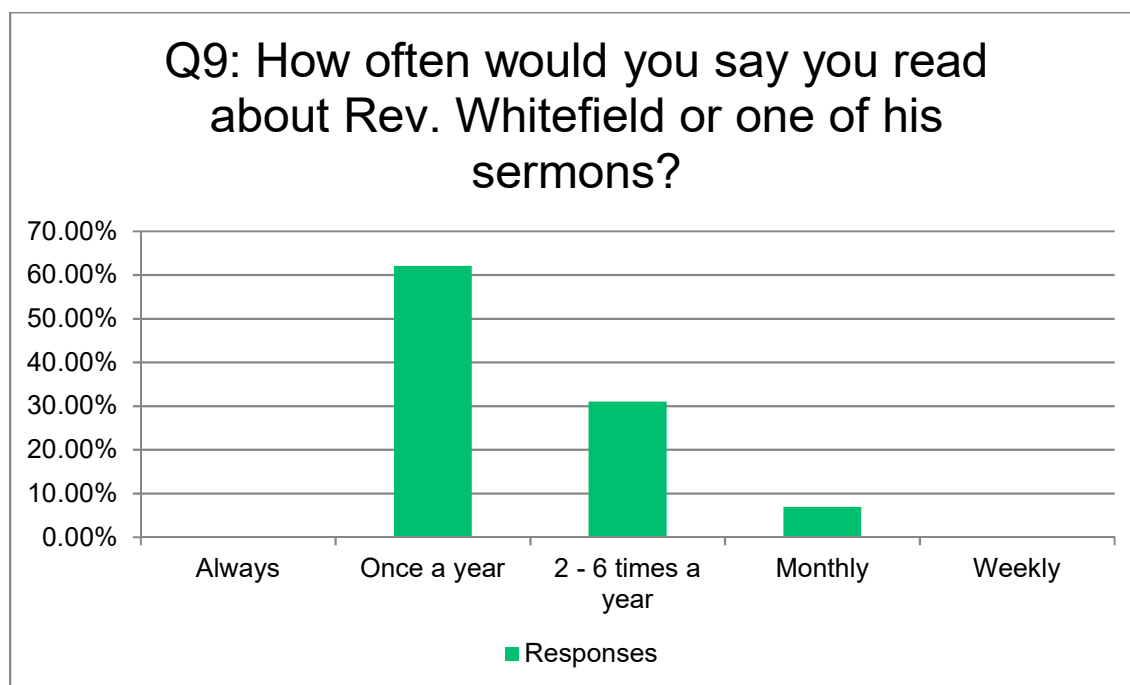
Participants were asked which aspect of Whitefield's preaching they found to be most moving. Forty-four percent indicated the evangelistic nature of his sermons. Thirty-seven percent indicated his ability to affect a wide demographic.

Figure 7: Question 8



The eighth question asked participants to note which area of their ministry is most affected by inspiration from Whitefield. Forty-five percent of the participants indicated evangelism was the area of ministry most affected by inspiration from Whitefield. Preaching was the next highest area that was affected by inspiration from Whitefield, noted by 28 percent of respondents.

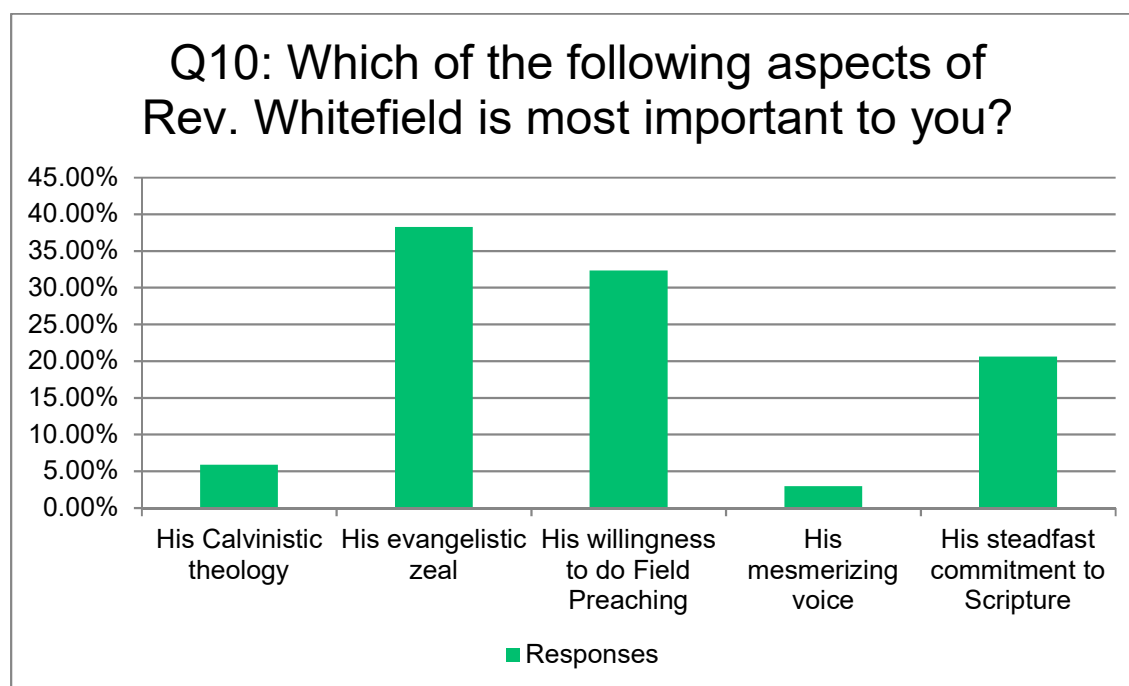
Figure 8: Question 9



This question asked, “How often would you say you read about Rev. Whitefield or one of his sermons?” Twenty-nine of 34 respondents answered the question, with five not answering. Eighteen respondents, or 62 percent, indicated they read about Whitefield or a sermon by Whitefield once a year. Nine respondents, or 31 percent, indicated they read something two to six times a year. Two respondents, or nearly seven percent, indicated they read something monthly. No respondent indicated they read about him always or weekly. It is possible that few are aware of the little-known Whitefield devotional that came out in 2014, edited by Randall Pederson, that provides a daily reading of Whitefield for each day of the year. Most readings are taken from his sermons,

although excerpts from letters, tracts, hymns and other miscellaneous writings are also included.²³⁸

Figure 9: Question 10



Participants were asked which of the following aspects of Reverend Whitefield is most important to them, his Calvinistic theology, his evangelistic zeal, his willingness to do field preaching, his mesmerizing voice, or his steadfast commitment to Scripture. All

²³⁸ Randall J. Pederson, ed. *George Whitefield: Daily Readings* (Fearn: Christian Heritage, 2010), introduction.

participants answered this question. The highest answers were his evangelistic zeal and his willingness to do field preaching, both 34 percent of the respondents. The next highest response was his steadfast commitment to Scripture.

Concerning field preaching, New England is littered with plaques noting a particular site at which Whitefield preached in the open air. One such spot is in West Brookfield, Massachusetts on what is known as Foster Hill. In Rowley, MA, at a site known as Pulpit Rock, off of Leslie Road, Whitefield preached to thousands gathered below the rocky hill.²³⁹

It is worth noting that his last sermon was a sermon preached in a field in Exeter, New Hampshire. As Kenneth Lawson reminds us, “He had not planned to preach, but was persuaded to do so, and preached from the text, “Examine Yourselves, Whether Ye be of Faith.”²⁴⁰ An outdoor platform had been constructed. The site is located at the current address of 58 Water St., Exeter, and the Physical Plant office for the Philips Exeter Academy is now located on the site. There is a small bronze plaque on a rock along the sidewalk which notes the occasion and location.

The lowest response to Question Ten was his voice, with only one respondent indicating it was the most important aspect for them. This is likely due to the fact that no

239 Geoff MacDonald, “Evangelicals on the Whitefield Trail,” *Christianity Today* (July 2009), 37.

240 Lawson, *The Evangelistic Zeal of George Whitefield*, 87.

one who completed the survey in 2018 had ever heard his voice. Benjamin Franklin describes his voice: “(Whitefield) had a loud and clear Voice, and articulated his Words and Sentences so perfectly that he might be heard and understood at a great Distance, especially as his Auditories, however numerous, observ’d the most exact Silence.”²⁴¹ In fact, Braxton Boren concludes that “the computer model predicts that Whitefield might have well been one of the loudest people that ever lived.”²⁴² Due to his frequent speaking engagements, Franklin also noted the practice that Whitefield gained:

So improv’d by frequency Repetitions, that every Accent, every Emphasis, every Modulation of the Voice, was so perfectly well turn’d and well placed, that without being interested in the Subject, one could not help being pleas’d with the Discourse, a Pleasure of much the same kind with that received from an excellent Piece of Musick.²⁴³

In the era when Whitefield preached, his voice was one of the characteristics that people admired about him. Dave Garrick, the English actor noted, “I would give a hundred guineas if I could say *oh* like Mr. Whitefield.”²⁴⁴ Benjamin Franklin noted, “He can bring men to tears merely by pronouncing the word “Mesopotamia.”²⁴⁵ Whitefield even impressed Sarah Edwards, whose husband was Jonathan Edwards: “He is a born

241 Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, 2e (New Haven, 1964), 179.

242 Boren, “George Whitefield’s Voice,” 176.

243 Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, 180.

244 Stephen Mansfield, *Forgotten Founding Father* (Nashville: Cumberland House, 2001), 10.

245 Mansfield, *Forgotten Founding Father*, 10.

orator.”²⁴⁶ While it may be disappointing that few recognize his voice as an outstanding characteristic today, it is not surprising given the fact that no one in the last 248 years has heard his voice. While it might be possible for the generation after his death to be impacted, we are numerous generations removed from that generation, so it is not surprising that his voice does not get the attention it did when his voice proclaimed the Gospel far and wide in the 1700s.

Interviews with Whitefield Authors

To augment the survey given to forty people, I interviewed five authors who have either written volumes about Whitefield or produced web-based content about Whitefield. All were contacted via phone and provided with the ten questions that were asked of them and the informed consent form. One interview was done on FaceTime, the rest by phone. The length of the interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 80 minutes. While some responses were predictable, other answers provide candid insight into their motivation for spilling more ink about the Grand Itinerant.

Question 1. When did your fascination with Whitefield begin?

²⁴⁶ Mansfield, *Forgotten Founding Father*, 10.

All five of the interviewees indicated they had learned of Whitefield in their twenties. Three had learned about him in the course of their graduate studies. Two learned about him through reading Arnold Dallimore's book. One of those who had learned about Whitefield through reading Dallimore's volume had met Dallimore when he was on a speaking tour. As these authors have produced highly academic volumes and projects about Whitefield, it is not surprising that their own study or a reading of Dallimore's volume was their introduction to Whitefield.

Question 2. Were there any people to recommend you to Whitefield?

One participant indicated it was their doctoral advisor who recommended them. One noted that it was organic, from reading about Whitefield, and no one person recommended Whitefield to them. As they began digging into sources, they discovered new topics. One learned about him through their own personal study of church history. It was evident that though in Whitefield's day people learned about him by hearing him in person or reading one of his sermons, in this era, reading about him either through his Journals or a secondary source including internet sources, is the way most learn about him today. The fact that three interviewees learned about him through their doctoral studies, is likely a unique experience and not the one of the average Christian.

Question 3. What was the first Whitefield source or volume that you read?

Two participants indicated it was Arnold Dallimore's Volume One. One indicated it was two volumes; Harry Stout's *The Divine Dramatist*, and Frank Lambert's *Pedlar in Divinity*. One noted that it was a primary source, Letters of Whitefield written in 1740. One noted it was the *Short Account, sermons and letters. John Gillies volume of letters*.

Question 4. What was the most important Whitefield source or volume that you read?

With this group of scholars, it was apparent that they would have each read many volumes about Whitefield. My hope was that the plethora of volumes could be distilled into a list that would be the most helpful for understanding the characteristics of Whitefield. The volumes listed by the authors were somewhat predictable, yet were insightful into new volumes that might not be as well-known as some of the more popular volumes. One cited Luke Tyerman's biography about Whitefield. One noted Michael Haykin's volume, *The Reformed Puritan*. as most important. Another noted Thomas Kidd's *biography*. Short account. His sermon, "Walking With God." One cited his unpublished journal located in the British Library in London, "It's real, raw, fresh Whitefield stuff. You really get a sense of his walk with the Lord. His sense of the Holy Spirit is really striking." This same author noted, It's difficult to read. Not many authors have made use of it, Dallimore looked at it. Lambert looked at it, but "probably the best use of it is by Bruce Hindmarsh's volume." One noted his journals. One noted Dallimore's Volume II, which he read in four days, with "Floods of tears." The average

admirer of Whitefield would not have access to Whitefield's unpublished journal in the British Library, as not only where it is located, but the fact that it is difficult to read.

Question 5: What was your first thought or impression of Whitefield?

One indicated, "I thought, this man was amazing!" "Where did he find the energy to accomplish all he did?" This is an insightful observation, as Whitefield notes in his *Journal*, in one forty-five-day tour in Massachusetts and Connecticut he delivered one hundred and seventy-five sermons to thousands of listeners.²⁴⁷ This energy did not seem to wane, for less than two months prior to his death he notes his preaching activity in a letter to Mr. Keen:

During this month I have been above a five hundred mile circuit and enabled to preach every day. The congregations have been very large, attentive and affected, particularly at Albany, Schenectady, Great Barrington, Norfolk, Salisbury, Sharon, Smithfield, Powkepsy, Fishkill, New Rumburt, New Windsor, and Peekskill...O what a new scene of usefulness is opening in various parts of the new world! All fresh work where I have been! The Divine influence is as at the first. Invitations crowd upon me, both from ministers and people.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ Whitefield, *Journal*, 482, 499.

²⁴⁸ Belden, *George Whitefield, the Awakener*, 221.

There are few pastors today who would preach that many sermons in one year! One author noted, “the remarkable hold by his hearers.” One indicated they were struck by his phenomenal popularity and the way the media facilitated his ministry. The story about Ben Franklin attempting to confirm his claim that he had 50,000 people listening on a single location, captured the attention of one author, “His popularity had fascinated me, especially with my interest in cultural memory.”

Question 6. “What Characteristic is most significant for you.”

One noted, “I can’t just say one characteristic, “Both his passion and his voice.”” One participant noted as a Christian, “how the Lord used Whitefield in powerful ways, in spite of his imperfections.” They noted that they thought that what many fail to notice about Whitefield is how incredibly hard-working Whitefield was. Noting that with his relentless work ethic, he was likely the hardest-working pastor in the eighteenth century. This likely contributed to his death at age fifty-five. He could not rest. He was sick frequently. One noted, “His outstanding voice.” One noted his capacity to get people to talk/listen about him. One noted his commitment to preach Jesus Christ. Unlike John Wesley, he had no desire to preserve his legacy. Capacity to get people to listen to him.

Question 7: What was your primary goal in your work about Whitefield?

One noted, “To make him better known.” “Wesley is known more, and I wanted Whitefield to be as known as Wesley.” One indicated, “to bridge the divide between the more pietistic biographies (Dallimore) and the more scholarly biographies (Stout, Lambert).” Several earlier books were more thematic, so I thought that my volume would bridge the gap, one noted. Another noted, “To demonstrate what God can do through one person.” One writer said, “To draw connections between the print culture and his work and to develop a sense of the theological foundation in Whitefield.

Question 8: “To what do you attribute the contemporary interest in Whitefield to?”

One author noted the volumes by Arnold Dallimore and the publishing work of The Banner of Truth Trust. The Calvinistic circles such as The Gospel Coalition and the Desiring God community were those with greater interest. One noted the comparative studies about Whitefield as drawing in larger numbers of those outside traditional evangelical circles. Always an interest in evangelical circles in the great preachers of the church. There is an appreciation for Whitefield because he is reformed, theologically.

Question 9: Who do you think is admiring Whitefield today?

One author indicated that they thought those later in life admire Whitefield. They thought that few young people are admiring Whitefield. One noted those over fifty years

of age. Two indicated Reformed Calvinists. One indicated Younger Calvinists were interested in Whitefield today. Banner of Truth group that admires him. Growing younger movement.

Question 10: What do you see as the future direction of Whitefieldian studies?

One indicated the future was in the publication of the George Whitefield (1714-1770) Trans-Atlantic Protestantism project, currently being researched by David Ceri Jones. This project will publish 2,500 letters of Whitefield in both print and digital editions. While some of Whitefield's early letters were published by John Gillies, they were also heavily edited. Jones hopes publishing the original letters will offer readers a more realistic view of Whitefield.²⁴⁹ One author indicated compiling a "Whitefield Box" with everything one would want to know about Whitefield, including biography, letters, journal, and sermons, instead of having to look in multiple volumes for biographical information, journal entries, and sermons. One noted the volume from the Oxford conference, as representative of the future of Whitefield studies.

The purpose of this project was to determine the characteristics of the Rev. George Whitefield that are admired today and evaluate how those affect ministry in 2019.

²⁴⁹ David Ceri Jones, www.davidcerijones.com/blogspot.com, accessed February 2, 2019.

Through a survey of 34 Christians and interviews of five authors of Whitefield volumes or material, data was collected to offer insight into what is admired in Whitefield today, and how those admirations were developed. The majority of those surveyed and interviewed have known of Whitefield for many years, most over ten years, and many over twenty years. Most have learned about him through reading one of his sermons, journals, or a secondary source such as one of the many biographies written about him.

While there are a wide range of characteristics that are admired of Whitefield, his preaching, and his commitment to evangelism stand out as characteristics that have broad appeal. There is growing interest in Whitefield in numerous Christian circles. As one author noted, “Whitefield books sell.” There have been six volumes that focus solely on Whitefield, published in the last five years, with numerous chapters with Whitefield as the primary subject, in other volumes. In addition, the Whitefield Letters project directed by David Ceri Jones will offer new insights into Whitefield when completed.

With this project completed and data analyzed, we are ready to consider the results in Chapter Five and explore the changes and additions that might be done in future projects.

CHAPTER FIVE

EVALUATION AND SUMMARY

Having identified that many in Christendom admire Rev. Whitefield, yet no work has surveyed the characteristics that Christians admire in him, offering the pertinent volumes in the literature review and explaining the project design and outcomes, this thesis will now conclude with the evaluation and summary.

For centuries Whitefield has been remembered in the shadows of many of his contemporaries. Few had the impact that Whitefield did across so many countries and social classes. While many volumes have offered biographical sketches of Whitefield, recent works have focused on particular themes in Whitefield's ministry, offering fresh insights into his impact across a number of areas.

Having served for over a decade as pastor of the church where Whitefield is buried, I have seen the impact Whitefield has had in the hearts of many. I have listened to some who were called to gospel ministry after having read an account of Whitefield. I have seen people moved to tears as they have viewed Whitefield's crypt. I have preached in the same meetinghouse that he proclaimed the truth of the Gospel. I have stood on the

rocky cliff where he addressed two thousand people in a New England field.²⁵⁰ I have seen his rib that is in the archives of Harvard Medical School.²⁵¹ In fact, I am one who was inspired by his preaching and ministry.

The survey of Christians conducted as part of this research project identified some of the gaps in understanding between those who first heard him preach in the 1700's and those who admire him today for his courage, energy, and impactful ministry. The interviews with several Whitefield authors offered insights into some of these significant literary endeavors. New insights into Whitefield are on the horizon.

The ministry of George Whitefield could not have been predicted. Being raised in a less than pious environment, with little spiritual direction or models of ministry, his life is one that is a true example of what God can accomplish through a life wholly yielded to Jesus Christ. There is no doubt that Whitefield was called to the ministry that lasted until his last breath on earth. It is remarkable that after 248 years those who never got to hear him preach, which is what he was known for in the 1700s, admire him these centuries later, despite no denomination or movement that bears his name. Numerous naming opportunities have survived over these years, including towns named after him in New Hampshire and Maine, after his visits there in the 1700's. Having impacted the culture of South Carolina, a Square in Charleston is named after him, Whitefield Square, named in

250 MacDonald, "Evangelicals on the Newburyport Trail," *Christianity Today*, July 2009, 36.

251 Thomas Kidd, *George Whitefield America's Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 256. On April 22, 2014 I visited the Harvard Medical School archives and held the rib.

1871. Also named after him is the George Whitefield United Methodist Church in West Brookfield, MA. There was a Whitefield Church in Newburyport, MA for many years, although after merging with other church, it no longer exists. Andrew Atherstone offers numerous traditions that continue to remember Whitefield including flowers shows and bed races.²⁵²

This study was engaged to determine what, if any characteristics are lasting of Whitefield that are admired today. Two groups were engaged to determine these characteristics, first a group of forty Christians, many of whom are pastors and missionaries and second, a group of authors who have written either a volume on Whitefield or web-based content on Whitefield. This researcher was delighted with the higher than expected response rate of eighty-five percent from those sent a survey to complete online. All the participants had visited Old South Church, Newburyport, MA. Nearly all of them had taken a tour of the church with the researcher. Some of these I had not had contact with in four to six years. If I were to engage in a similar study in the future, I would attempt to contact the participant prior to sending the survey. One recipient required three email addresses before I found the correct one, as he had switched churches twice since I had last seen him. Most of those who were sent a survey responded within three days. Several indicated they needed more time to complete it. One person was out of the country, and did not have access to email, so failed to complete it.

²⁵² Andrew Atherstone, from a lecture I attended at the Whitefield at 300 Conference, Pembroke College, Oxford University, June 22, 2014.

In the future I would send out a second email reminder if they had not completed the survey. Due to the anonymous nature of the survey, I did not know who completed the survey and who did not unless they informed me, which several participants did. The research consultant suggested that the survey be anonymous to ensure more trustworthy data.

The questions asked in the survey were designed to focus on the characteristics admired in Whitefield, and what might have shaped those who responded. I was initially surprised that most of the respondents were mature Christians. Yet, in interviewing the Whitefield authors, who perhaps had a specific audience in mind, when they wrote their volume, their responses of who were those they thought were interested in Whitefield, the majority of those who responded to the survey, were the ones that many of the authors suggested were interested in Whitefield today. This was likely self-selecting as those who visited Old South Church to learn more about Whitefield most likely had some level of interest.

I was surprised by how many participants indicated that they had been influenced by Whitefield a little or none at all, sixteen out of thirty-four respondents. Whitefield had such a dramatic influence on thousands when he was preaching and teaching. This is an opportunity for additional resources that might make his writings more accessible to Christians. Scores of people were called to ministry as a result of being called to a “new birth” by Whitefield. His influence of calling people into Christian service appears to

have waned. He appears to inspire Christians more than affecting those who are not Christians currently.

I was particularly interested in which literature is being read about Whitefield. I was expecting some of the secondary literature to be widely read, however his *Journal* and sermons ranked high among sources about Whitefield being read. Banner of Truth Trust has given Christendom a blessing by publishing his *Journal* and sermons for the world to enjoy. While Whitefield's sermons sold thousands of copies in the 1700s, the majority of people heard his sermons either in churches or the open air. The survey bore out the reality of the staying power of Arnold Dallimore's biography from the 1970s. There are few volumes that stand the test of time, and Dallimore's is one of them. Despite a plethora of Whitefield biographies in the last decade, there are few as sweeping and accessible as Dallimore's two-volume work.

One of the most helpful questions was the question asking respondents to indicate a characteristic not listed. This list was far reaching and had over twenty different answers. Some of the response were predictable, such as his zeal for preaching, perseverance, and willingness to travel to preach. I was surprised by the number of respondents who mentioned a contemporary of Whitefield, such as Jonathan Edwards or John Wesley, as well as his friend Benjamin Franklin. Some of the responses were not specifically a characteristic, such as "His connection with Wesley," yet were a snippet in the life of Whitefield. An additional line describing what was intended by a "characteristic" may have focused the participants responses a little more. This will be

employed in future surveys. Eleven respondents left this question blank, and one indicated it, but failed to list any response. In future surveys I would offer an additional line encouraging a response. I believe this would have increased the responses for this question. While I asked participants which volume was most helpful, I should have asked if they had ever read a sermon or his journals. Numerous recipients indicated one of these were helpful to them, but I did not ask if all had read them.

The question that asked what area of your ministry is most affected by inspiration from Whitefield resulted in evangelism and preaching being noted most. This is hopeful news as evangelism is often not emphasized in many churches. The fact that he inspires a significant portion of those who responded means there is potential to motivate congregations to once again be active in sharing the gospel to those who do not believe.

I contacted six Whitefield authors, of which five agreed to be interviewed. One never responded. In the future I will contact interviewees with months of advance notice to work around publishing and grading commitments. The most moving responses were by those who believed they could make a difference in how Whitefield is viewed by the publication of their volume. As those writing for an audience, they appeared to have their pulse on what readers want in resources about Whitefield. The authors provided unique insight when asked what they thought would be the future direction of Whitefieldian studies. The most obvious answer is the “George Whitefield (1714-1770) and the Transatlantic Protestantism Project” being undertaken by David Ceri Jones, in Wales. Two authors noted this project. Jones’s work will provide the first complete edition of

Whitefield's correspondence. This edition will offer up to 2,500 items.²⁵³ This will be a gold mine of Whitefield resources, and has the potential to yield numerous dissertation topics and as well as entire volumes. It is Jones's hope to write a biography using these new letters. This will expand on the work of Ernest Johnston, who, up to 2019, has produced the largest prior collection of unreleased letters since Banner of Truth Trust published his *Journals*. Several authors offered additional insights, noting that themes about Whitefield continue to be developed. With more recent biographies being released, it is safe to predict that more Christians will be reading about him in the years ahead. As more students are introduced to Whitefield, more will likely study him in depth. No longer are readers forced to choose from a small selection of Whitefield books at their local Christian bookstore. During the course of this research, I encountered many who had never heard the name of Whitefield. Many lived within a short drive of where Whitefield traveled and preached in the 1700s, on one of his six visits to America.

At the centenary celebration of his death on September 30, 1870, in Newburyport, Massachusetts, Old South Church Pastor Jonathan Sterns noted that, "Whitefield's voice could still be heard throughout the English-speaking world, 'in every corner of the globe,' and would grow 'louder and louder' as the voice echoes on down the coming

253 David Ceri Jones, www.davidceri.blogspot.com, accessed February 2, 2019.

century and to the remote generations.”²⁵⁴ This prediction has proved to be true. Perhaps not without a few years of faint whispers, but now that has increased to a thundering roar.

Whitefield’s impact on the landscape of Anglo-American evangelicalism is unrivaled. Thomas Kidd summarizes this impact:

First, Whitefield was the most influential Anglo-American evangelical leader of the eighteenth century. His colleague and frequent rival John Wesley left a greater organizational legacy and his ally Jonathan Edwards made a more significant theological contribution. But Whitefield was the key figure in the first generation evangelical Christianity; of the three, he linked, by far, the most pastors and leaders through his relentless travels, preaching, publishing, and letter-writing networks. Without him, Anglo-American evangelicalism would have hardly represented a coherent movement. From his first remarkable meetings at Moorfields to his last tour of the colonies, he saw and met more people in Britain, Ireland, and America than any other person of the era. His labors, above any other factor, virtually invented a sense of common trans-Atlantic evangelical identity.²⁵⁵

George Whitefield continues to capture the hearts of those who desire revival in their own lives and in the church. With numerous fresh volumes being released, there is unlimited potential to deepen our understanding of Whitefield. His voice has indeed gotten “louder and louder” as Reverend Sterns predicted. It is true that despite the passage of nearly 250 years, his is a voice still being heard.

²⁵⁴ *Centennial Commemoration of the Death of George Whitefield, in Old South Church, Newburyport, MA, Sept. 30, 1870* (Newburyport, MA), 37.

²⁵⁵ Kidd, *George Whitefield America’s Spiritual Founding Father*, 260.

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